Reframing Singapore: memory - identity - trans-regionalism

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REFRAMING SINGAPORE

Memory – Identity –
Trans-Regionalism

Edited by
Derek Heng *and* **Syed Muhd Khairudin Aljunied**

Reframing Singapore

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Edited Volumes 6

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Foreword

For a small country like Singapore, serving as a key ship-stop to help British imperial expansion for more than a century and only an independent island-state since 1965, there have certainly been a lot of books published about it. That number has grown more quickly of late, in part because Singapore is a success story that seems to fit an era of capitalist globalization most comfortably. But there are also other reasons why there are so many books and essays written. The island-city acts like a migrant multicultural state in a region that has discovered the idea of native nations. It is a one-team regime that has won every election since 1965 and marginalized an increasingly feeble opposition. It rose from a rowdy imperial entrepot to become a major transport hub for the world and its communities have become purposeful and competitive at higher levels than anyone could have imagined four decades ago. As many have noted, it has continued to fight above its weight in large and tough arenas. And there are more reasons that one can list, including something unlikely only a dozen years ago. It attracts attention in a large numbers of scholarly fields, not only in the engineering, physical and health sciences but also in the arts and social sciences.

One measure of that was the very successful conference its younger scholars organized in Singapore six years ago, the Third International Convention of Asia Scholars, where some 940 papers about various aspects of Asian studies were presented. Four years after that, at the Fifth convention held in Kuala Lumpur in 2007, there continued to be keen interest in Singapore. Thirteen of the papers selected for this collection were first presented there. Of the fifteen authors, five are from Singapore and four from Australia, one each from Europe, Japan, Philippines and Hong Kong and two are now in the United States. They work in academic disciplines ranging from history and political science to geography, sociology and economics and represent a good sample of recent efforts to present alternative perspectives to the dominant Singapore government discourse.

The choice of book title, *Reframing Singapore*, reflects the trends of the past ten years since the publication of *The Singapore Story* by the former Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew. From the publication of the edited volume, *Lee's Lieutenants*, which appeared soon after that (1999) till the

most recent collection of papers, *Paths Not Taken* (2008), many historians and others have come out to fill in the gaps in the official narrative, including accounts of events and people that have not found a place there.

The introduction to this book by the editors, Dr Heng and Dr Aljunied, captures the current trends well. It gives an outline of how Singapore's history has been written since the new nation was established. Those familiar with the first decades after its independence may recall that there was a period when the state was shy about any close examination of its history, when young people were discouraged from asking probing questions about its past. That policy has now been reversed and there is greater attention paid to the multiple forces that made Singapore what it is today. But it has been difficult to change people's mindset about the uses of the past and a great deal still needs to be done to enable new generations of Singaporeans to recognize the dimensions of what their country has achieved as well as what opportunities have been lost. The introduction and several of the papers included here provide provocative thoughts about some neglected topics. They also examine some of the different ways new and little known sources for a more comprehensive history one day might now be gathered, preserved and used.

The editors have highlighted something worth emphasizing. Although the Singapore story is work in progress, the scholarly world should not wait for more to be tested or achieved. A great deal more is now known about earlier periods of history that form the background to the modern state's successes. Much more has also happened since the end of the Second Word War that, if examined carefully, would enable us to better understand the small country's trajectories of social and economic growth. Heng and Khairudin point out that the conditions for a systematic rediscovery of Singapore's diversity could do with improvement. More work is needed by a new generation of scholars like those represented here to lift the level of discourse to one that can satisfy the demands of the twenty-first century. And, most important of all, for a place like Singapore, it is not more documents and writings with a loyalist national perspective that are called for, but research and thinking that reflect the global outlook that has enabled the island-state to achieve its present eminence. This volume of essays seeks to build on that condition and I congratulate the editors and their colleagues for urging us to head in that direction.

Wang Gungwu
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
National University of Singapore
22 January 2009

1   Introduction

Syed Muhd Khairudin Aljunied and Derek Heng

Any tourist who strolls along the Singapore River will find picturesque cityscapes that evoke paradoxical mental images in the mind. Skyscrapers are juxtaposed with shop houses that have been synthetically preserved so as to suggest memories of the island's past. Painted black and raised high on a concrete pedestal, the statue of the colony's British 'founder', Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles, stares at the modern, durian-shaped Esplanade Theatres on the Bay. Colonialism was here, and so were the Japanese. A tour of the Asian Civilizations Museum adds to the sense of confusion and ambivalence. Impressed by high-tech displays of the tapestry of cultures that evolved over the last two centuries and the migration of men and women from far-off lands, the tourist wonders why Chinese, Malays, Indians and 'Others' are the only categories, which have been accorded demographic significance. She would be informed later of the authoritarianism and the technocracy. But the orderliness, security and comfort she has enjoyed thus far tend to disguise the assertions of injustice. The hotel manager says he is from Chennai, India. The chambermaid who changes the bed sheets proudly affirms that she is a Filipina. The Chinese men talking amongst themselves along the sidewalks of a nearby shopping centre sound like they are from Guangzhou. What is this place? What has kept it going? Who are its indigenous inhabitants? When did its history begin?

Indeed, no single word could better describe Singapore to a visitor than 'paradox'. Placed uneasily at the centre of the Malay-dominated region of Southeast Asia, almost all of the island's population came from somewhere else. So much so that the claim to indigenousness is often contradicted by evidence that the island was, in essence, a no man's land or, at the very least, a haven for wild beasts and pirates. Records show that the man responsible for naming the island was Sang Nila Utama, a thirteenth-century Sumatran prince. Having survived a shipwreck, he was impressed when he saw what he thought was a strange animal. Unaware that the creature was actually a Malayan tiger, he surmised that it was a lion (or *singa*). Singapura, or 'Lion City', thus became the new name of a place previously known as Temasek, and it was during Sang Nila Utama's time that Singapore first gained fame as a centre of trade, migration, and commerce, attracting people from near

and far. He was responsible for transforming Singapore into a cosmo-politan port and the seat of a Malay kingdom (Heng 1999). Yet his con-tributions have been paradoxically consigned to the margins of history as myths and legends of old. Seizing his rightful place was a Briton who landed on the island in 1819. He transformed the small island into part of a larger imperial project. An enigma, a schemer, an orientalist, a genius and not particularly sane, Thomas Stamford Raffles is the embo-diment of all of Singapore's paradoxes, as well as serving as *the* Eur-opean icon of a quintessentially Asian Singapore.

The contradictory and paradoxical nature of Singapore since Sang Nila Utama's time is due largely to its internal and external geography. Internally, the absence of a substantial hinterland and an agrarian base has led rulers, administrators and politicians on the island to integrate Singapore into the global economy as much as possible. Raffles was not exaggerating when he noted that no trade on the island could be carried out without the support of the Arabs, Jews and Chinese, who domi-nated the seas in the nineteenth century (Aljunied 2005: 24). Since Sin-gapore was almost uninhabited when he arrived here, Raffles decided that the most effective way to meet the demand for labour was to tap into external sources of manpower. Indians from other areas of the Brit-ish Empire were thus brought into the port city in successive waves. Meanwhile Europeans, Eurasians, Armenians and Jews settled at sites where commercial activities predominated. The Malays were provided with land adjacent to the Sultan Hussein's residence. While their hopes, successes and failures have been memorialised in museum exhibits and succeeding generations of their descendants have contributed to the hybrid cultural mosaic of modern Singapore, the policy of attracting 'foreign talent' to stimulate a trans-regional trading framework con-tinues to this day (Faizal 2008).

The external geography of Singapore poses yet another paradox. Lo-cated at the southern end of the Straits of Melaka, the waters around Singapore have long served as a maritime passageway between the South China Sea, the Java Sea and the Indian Ocean. It has been the lo-cus of trade wars between European powers, namely the Portuguese, Dutch, Spanish and British, and a precious jewel for the Acheh, Johore and Melakan sultanates in their quest for total dominance in the region (Borschberg 2004b). And yet, to the extent that this geographical im-perative has proved beneficial for the island, it has also placed Singa-pore in a vulnerable position. The island has, from time to time, been threatened by pirates and contending warships that navigated these waterways. The 2004 tsunami that claimed more than one hundred thousand lives across the Indian Ocean points to the fact that Singapore is vulnerable to the forces of nature. That said, however, it is the conflu-ence of such internal and external factors that has shaped the ebb and

flow of the economy and politics of Singapore since the thirteenth century. It has, without a doubt, determined the nature of migration flows, the structures of everyday life, the creation of hybrid identities, and, more importantly, the construction of memory and history.

Nowhere have the concerns with geographical imperatives, the making of identities and the rendering of Singapore's past been more clearly manifested than at the International Convention of Asia Scholars 5, held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, in early August 2007. Most of the scholars who presented papers on Singapore at that significant gathering were unequivocal in their conclusion that, having attained independence in 1965 and having undergone a protracted project of constructing the nation-state over the last forty years, the same issues that have characterised Singapore's experiences since Sang Nila Utama's era persist till this very moment. In this regard, the years 1819 and 1965 are perceived as the reference points for many of the papers that were delivered at the convention. This introduction will not address the question of whether or not the use of such dates – with the accompanying problems and latent conclusions – is a useful or valid point of departure for scholarly discussions. However, it is clear that these two dates appear to allow for the nuances pertaining to the issues dealt with by the various scholarly fields to be highlighted in greater contrast than would otherwise have been perceivable or possible. The amplifications of 1819 and 1965 serve as key threads that bind together the diverse fields of scholarly work on Singapore produced in the present decade.

The present volume attempts to address some of the long-standing questions and problems considered by the present scholarship on Singapore by bringing into focus the period between 1819 and 1965, whilst not neglecting the years beyond this crucial time frame. Drawing upon various theories, concepts and methodologies developed in the humanities and social sciences, each of these papers reflects the trends in Singapore and Singapore-related studies emanating from academic traditions in Australia, Singapore, the United States and Great Britain. At first glance, these traditions seem to be at odds with one another; but, when viewed as the product of what may be regarded as an emerging or 'new school of Singapore studies', three underlying themes link the current scholarship to the papers in this volume. These three themes are memory and history, identity, and trans-regionalism.

'[T]he struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting', says Milan Kundera, a Czech author and critic whose deep love for his homeland led, paradoxically, to his exile to France in 1975 (Kundera 1982: 3). The struggle against the hegemony of state-sponsored renderings of Singapore's past, together with the recovery of forgotten memories, characterise the first part of this volume. Derek Heng argues that the nationalist historiographical project, though

compelling, has been tenuous and, at times, unable to keep pace with
the rapid changes which the city-state experienced over the years follow-
ing its independence. This has resulted in a constant revision of histor-
iographical conceptions, shifting from the affirmation of a shared 'na-
tional past' to the celebration of differences. Still, the rhetoric of unity
in diversity that the present government has successfully fostered de-
picts the past as a foreign country. Singapore's attainment of a globally
renowned cosmopolitan outlook has been primarily attributed to the
postcolonial project of capitalist modernity. Koh Keng We takes these
notions to task by elucidating the intimate relations between three Ma-
lay elite families based in different locations in the Riau Islands, Singa-
pore and Johor, during the time of Anglo-Dutch imperialism in Singa-
pore and beyond. These elites adopted strategies of survival, including
the refashioning of their image, the forging of new networks with old
powers, and the reform of aspects of their rule, which provided persua-
sive evidence for their agency in modernising the region.

Following the same lines of argument, Syed Muhd Khairudin Alju-
nied brings into vivid focus the masking of Singapore's past through a
progressive national narrative. He disputes the idea that, during the im-
mediate post-World War Two period, Singapore was, in essence, a tu-
multuous site that was rife with hostility and violence arising from colo-
nial neglect. Rather, the mutual co-operation between different commu-
nities on the island, combined with the aid given by the colonial state
during the aftermath of the Maria Hertogh riots in 1950, demonstrates
that communalism, insofar as it existed, was counteracted by cosmopo-
litanism on the part of all of the parties concerned. Building upon these
insights, Loh Kah Seng, elucidates the politics of housing and fires in
the same era, whilst maintaining that the PAP government's approach
to disaster management was in no way a major departure from that of
the British. Not only were the PAP's modernist high-rise housing
schemes a derivative of imperialism, but its strategies to outdo local op-
position parties and personalities were also an extension of colonial
practice. Coming closer to the present and bringing women back into
history, Ernest Koh examines the disciplining processes that took place
in factories as Singapore entered the industrialisation phase of its devel-
opment. The forgotten voices of women who struggled to make ends
meet by enduring the long hours and penalties meted out by their male
managers should, according to Ernest Koh, be unearthed because it re-
veals how the subaltern classes have often paid the price for govern-
mental efforts to create a globalised economy.

It has often been said that Singapore is a place without an identity,
and that Singaporeans do not possess any real sense of belonging to
their homeland. This, as some scholars would argue, is due primarily
to the seemingly endless redevelopment projects. Old neighbourhoods

have been demolished to make way for new towns, vernacular street names have been anglicised and, even if millions of dollars have been spent to preserve selected heritage sites, dramatic changes in the landscape surrounding these sites conjure up an uncanny feeling of anachronism (Ooi and Shaw 2004: 127-130). The chapters that constitute the second part of this volume challenge this viewpoint. Bonny Tan's survey of a wealth of literature devoted to the socio-political life of Babas in Singapore informs us that there has been a concerted attempt by the members of this creole community to reassert their unique sense of being, which straddles the divide between Singapore and Peninsular Malaysia. The same degree of concern for one's own identity is found in the life and activism of Han Wai Toon, who, as Wong Wai Yee has lucidly explained, belonged to both China and Singapore. More interestingly, Han Wai Toon's research on and preservation of Chinese porcelains coincided with the period that saw the flowering of the Baba identity under the auspices of British imperial rule, as highlighted by Bonny Tan. Colonialism was thus more than a system of exploitation; it provided the impetus for cultural change and revival. This process has continued in the context of postcolonial Singapore.

Lenore Lyons and Michele Ford's study of national rhetoric and racial diatribes propounded by state agencies in Singapore illustrates that a sense of superiority arising from these modalities has been inculcated among Singaporean Malay men, vis-à-vis non-Singaporean Malays. This was clearly manifested in the Singaporean Malay men's assertions of 'Malaysian-Malay backwardness' and 'Indonesian corruption'. To the extent that Singaporean Malay men remain conscious of their marginalised status, they are willing to put their Singaporean identity above their ethnic roots when they travel outside of Singapore. Caroline Pluss' chapter on Chinese-Singaporeans in Hong Kong corroborates and extends such findings. In explicating the ways in which these expatriates develop their own trans-national *habiti*, she found that, whilst they had assigned primacy to their having been born and raised in Singapore, Chinese-Singaporeans in Hong Kong had incorporated new cultural elements in order to gain access to new social networks, and to gain benefits from these networks.

Scholarly discussions surrounding identity politics and personal linkages across national and regional boundaries have often been framed within the context of outward flows, from the local or internal to the external. The focus has also been on venture capitalists congregating in Singapore to leverage the networks tied to communities on the island. However, in recent years, developments in other, unfamiliar terrains have become apparent, such as the influx of cultural capitalism, which forms the crux of the discussions in the remaining four chapters of the present volume. Faisal bin Yahya and Arunajeet Kaur's chapter seeks to

show that the influx of wealth from the Indian Subcontinent to Singapore is due partly to the linkages established by the waves of Indian migration during the British colonial era. By exploiting a new mass cultural capital – the Indian cinema – to popularise Singapore, state agencies have been successful in generating tourist spending and tapping into an increasingly globalised and technologically savvy South Asian economy. Such efforts at popularising Singapore as a cultural destination, given that the island seems to have very little to offer in the way of a rich historical heritage, is further supported and reinforced by the development of corporate brands that conjure up an imaginary sense of tradition. Chris Hudson's chapter on the branding of Raffles Hotel in Singapore and its subsidiary hotels around the world suggests that aggressive marketing strategies and the popularisation of imaginary cultural experiences have not only been exploited to stimulate Singapore's tourist industry; it has, moreover, been repackaged and exported as corporate capital, to advance Singapore's image abroad.

To be sure, globalisation, until very recently in the late twentieth century, has been seen as having a great impact upon state economies, particularly for Singapore, since its existence is contingent upon foreign investment (Stigliltz 2002). However, the advancement of information technology over the last ten years has opened up a social dimension in the study of the impact of globalisation and its implications upon the island's trans-regional experiences. Yoshimichi Yui's paper on the role of recruitment agencies for Japanese workingwomen in Singapore suggests that information technology has had a levelling effect upon employer-employee relations, influencing the dynamics of foreign employment. Employment no longer occurs along the traditional lines of expatriate assignments, but increasingly along the lines of local demands and remuneration terms. Along with these changes come social factors that motivate foreign individuals to seek employment in Singapore. This includes the desire to experience life abroad, the decline of early marriages in Japan and the need to establish some form of economic security for oneself. In other words, social conditions that exist in another country have a direct impact on the nature of the Singaporean economy, including the development of the Singapore labour market.

Similarly, information technology has led not only to the reduction of the obstacles imposed by physical space between geographical locations but even to the eradication of these obstacles altogether. Janet Arnado's chapter develops the argument that the presence and role of Filipina women in the domestic settings of Singaporean households, their social links and obligations to their families in the Philippines, and the new trans-national and oftentimes trans-regional social and familial linkages that they form, calls for a radical redefinition of the parameters of kinship and family units. Whereas these social units have traditionally

been defined by certain imperatives, such as geographical location, the ability to engage in mutual communication and interaction, and the importance of the respective roles played by the members of these social units, such as Filipina domestic workers, suggest otherwise. The Internet, mobile phones and Short Messaging Services (SMS) have revolutionised what it means to be part of a 'family'.

These social trends that are emerging within trans-regional spheres, the ambiguities of identity occurring in the face of decades of social engineering projects and the trend toward recovering the island's history through the lenses of the common man amid the tide of globalisation, constitute the 'paradoxes' that characterise any study of Singapore. It is obvious that even as Singapore traverses rapidly along its twenty-first-century trajectory of becoming a globalised city-state, it will have to deal with the same challenges and issues that have characterised its history of the past seven hundred years. Viewed in that light, the contributors of this volume unambiguously agree that there is an urgent need to reassess the accepted notions and discourses on Singapore's past, as well as the need to reconceptualise our understanding of the challenges faced at present. Granted that this concerted project of 'reframing Singapore', initiated by a new generation of academics from a variety of specialisations, locations and backgrounds, is neither novel nor new. However, if the pages of this volume have spurred its readers to rethink commonplace assumptions and truisms about Singapore and, in the process, foster the beginnings of new fields of enquiry, then it has fulfilled its humble purpose.

REFRAMING THE HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

2 From Political Rhetoric to National History: Bi-Culturalism and Hybridisation in the Construction of Singapore's Historical Narrative

Derek Heng Thiam Soon

Introduction

Singapore's national historical narrative has been employed by the relatively young nation-state as a means to justifying its existence. The goal has been to establish a relevance of the past in the present, and even the perceived future, at the level of state, society and sub-groups. The historiography of Singapore's past, since its independence in 1965, has thus been an intertwined interaction between two key elements – the political imperatives and rhetoric of the state, and the discourse that Singapore society is engaged in.

The formulation of the national narrative has not taken place in a vacuum, but has consistently been partnered with academic developments in the field of history. Here, professional historians have been deeply committed to presenting relevant approaches and frameworks, as well as building up critical masses of scholarly output. This academic output therefore forms the basis upon which the national narrative would be produced. This synchrony in academic and national history does not seem to have been the result of any direct dialogue between the state and the academic community. What is apparent, however, is the degree to which the academic community seems to be attuned to the imperatives identified and promulgated by the rhetoric of the state. The academic output then establishes the academic foundation and credibility, upon which the national narrative is then constructed.

This process of the formulation of the national historical narrative is of particular relevance in the present time, given that the twenty-first century poses significant challenges to Singapore's economy, society and politics. The country is at the threshold of significant transformations, a culmination of the regionalising and internationalising policies put in place by the Singapore government. While such policy changes have been in effect since the early 1990s up until the first years of the twenty-first century, the national historical narrative has only recently appeared to be on the brink of a fundamental change in form to achieve

several long-term objectives: to put forth to the people of Singapore the historical justifications for the promulgation of the policies and their effects, as well as to socialise the mindset of the population towards being predisposed to being an internationalised society.

It is in this context that the present paper attempts to appraise the state of scholarship, both academic and national, on the history of Singapore, in relation to the issues that are currently at the forefront of social and political discussions in the country – bi-culturalism and hybridisation. The paper will begin by tracing the interaction between political rhetoric, academic scholarship and the national narrative since 1965. It will then attempt to hypothesise the trajectory and possibilities of incorporating bi-culturalism and hybridisation into the historical narrative of Singapore at this critical juncture.

Political Rhetoric and the Evolving Historical Narrative of Singapore

The rhetoric emanating from Singapore's political leadership, from as early as the 1960s, has played an integral role in the formulation of the content and form of the national narrative. This is apparent in the national narratives that have been developed since 1965 to the present.

Two key historical issues have been at the centre of the debates among Singapore's political leaders since 1965. The first was the fact that Singapore was naturally an integral part of the Malay Peninsula, with the geography and economy of the former being indivisibly tied to the latter, links that were further enmeshed by social links, such as kinship ties. This argument came to the fore, and became a protracted topic of discussion that preoccupied the political discourse of Singapore, after Malaysia was accorded its independence from British rule in 1957. The apparently intrinsic ties between Singapore and the Malay Peninsula became the platform that was used in the rhetoric for independence by the early 1960s, particularly by the People's Action Party and Labour Front Government.

The political players of Singapore did not necessarily universally share this view. The so-called 'communist' political leaders, including those in the PAP, such as Fong Swee Swan and Lim Chin Siong, were opposed to Singapore becoming a part of an independent Malaysia (Lee 1998: 446-452). With the detentions of these leaders by the British and Malayan governments in 1963, and the English-educated PAP leaders emerging as the political victors in 1963, the inseparability of Singapore from Malaysia became the dominant political rhetoric. This continued to be expounded after 1965, when Singapore broke away from Malaysia and became independent (Lee 1998: 653, 654).

The second issue pertains to national consciousness that was to be based on the newly constructed nation-state of Malaya, as opposed to ethnic-based nationalism. This recent and modern social-consciousness called for the acknowledgement of the place of people who arrived in Malaya and Singapore from places like China, India and Southeast Asia, as well as people of mixed descent, all of whom were the products of the legacy of British rule in the Malay Peninsula. The Malayan consciousness therefore entailed a modern, albeit artificial, sense of being and identity in line with the creation of a new state that historically never existed before.

While these issues arose in the pre-1965 period, they continued to be expounded in the years after 1965, not least because the Singapore leaders who put forth these issues in the political rhetoric continued to be the political leaders of Singapore after independence in 1965. They continued to believe in the concept of Malayanism (the equality of all citizens within the nation-state of Malaysia), and saw Singapore as an unnatural occurrence that unfortunately had no other choice but to be successful. These two issues continued to appear in the political rhetoric into the early 1970s. These were framed as part of the imperative in the construction of a national consciousness amongst Singaporeans, albeit 'Singaporeanism' in place of 'Malayanism'.

The first national historical narrative, which began to emerge in the late 1970s, was therefore a narrative that depicted Singapore's historical experiences in the context of colonialism, nationalism and state-formation in the nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries. The narrative essentially attempted to frame Singapore's past as the build up of the inevitability of nationalism that resulted from the Second World War and the Japanese occupation of Singapore between 1942 and 1945. These cataclysmic events apparently shattered the myth of the superior white man, convincing the population of Singapore that the colonial powers had no right to rule them and the land that they were inhabiting, and urged them to repossess the land and the right to self-government. This narrative is no different from the earlier debates, which also framed these historical developments within the context of Singapore as a part of the Malay Peninsula.

The narrative acknowledged that Singapore's population was comprised almost entirely of migrants that this port-city that had only emerged in 1819 following British intervention in Maritime Southeast Asia, and that no significant settlement had existed on the island prior to that time. Up until at least the 1950s, emotional linkages amongst the migrant population of Singapore, in particular the Indians and Chinese, were said to be traced directly back to the land from which these migrants came. Nonetheless, nationalism was assumed to have emerged as a result of the trauma of WWII and the Japanese occupa-

tion. The trauma of these shared common experiences were portrayed as synonymous among the various ethnic groups present in Singapore and the Malay Peninsula. These experiences formed the basis upon which the social consciousness – based on the nation-state as a modern creation, and which had not existed before in history – was constructed. The national narrative therefore argued for the inevitability of Singapore's independence by 1963, as part of Malaysia, in light of the nationalism developing in Asia and the decline of European colonialism, and the inevitability of its secession from Malaysia in 1965 as a fundamental shock, in light of the inseparability of Singapore from its hinterland – the Malay Peninsula. This first national narrative was presented to the country in 1984, with the publication of the pamphlet *25 Years of Nation-Building, 1959-1984: A Time to Celebrate, a Time to Stand Up for Singapore: Information Kit* (National Celebration Steering Committee 1984).

However, even as the first national narrative was being formulated during the late 1970s, by the late 1970s and early 1980s, Singapore's political rhetoric had undergone a rapid change. Following the successful development of its economic base and armed forces, as well as the elevation of its regional and international standing, Singapore's official rhetoric had progressed from assuaging the competing dialectic forces that were located along ethnic lines, and expounding on the inseparability of Singapore from the Malay Peninsula hinterland, to furthering the possibility of building and sustaining a viable city-state that was devoid of a hinterland, as well as the construction of a national consciousness based on the English model of a social contract between the state and its citizenry.

The roots of this rhetoric of a hinterland-less city-state could be found in a speech delivered by the then-foreign minister of Singapore, S. Rajaratnam to the Singapore Press Club in 1972 (Rajaratnam 1987: 225). In that speech, he compared Singapore's prospects to that of an ecumenical city that was linked economically and culturally to the rest of the world through the advancement of communications technology, a concept first forwarded by the urban historian Anthony Toynbee (Toynbee 1970). In real terms, this was marked by the success of the Jurong Industrial Estate project, which had been initiated in the early 1960s. The project only took off after Singapore gained full control of its economy from 1965 onwards, with Singapore's export-oriented economy only developing since the 1970s.

More importantly, the success of the export-oriented economy also paved the way for the political rhetoric to foster the need to increase the workforce's value-added productivity, the move towards higher value-added secondary economic activities, and the development of a coherent state-driven education program to cater to the needs of the current and planned future economic goals. In other words, the population was to

be engineered into a solitary, highly efficient and productive workforce. Thus, we can say that there was a need to streamline the categorisation of the citizenry into four racial groups – Chinese, Malays, Indians and Others. These four categories were to be subsumed under the singular social grouping called Singaporeans. Ethnic streamlining included governmental policies that aimed to emphasise the identity and capabilities of these four racial groups, while, at the same time, subtly dismantling the features that fostered more diverse social groupings that had hitherto been inherent to Singapore's society.

The success of the economic, defence and foreign policy aspects of the country led three of the key political leaders of Singapore – Lee Kuan Yew, S. Rajaratnam and Goh Keng Swee – to consistently explain, defend and rhetorically safeguard that which the whole world in 1965 had deemed as the virtually inconceivable and impossible achievement of sustaining a city-state with no natural resources. In the process, the rhetoric took on a first-person voice, expressing the thoughts and decisions that the political leaders of Singapore had to make during the critical years after 1965, decisions which led to the success of Singapore of the late 1970s and early 1980s (Chan and Obaid 1987; Goh 1977; Goh and Low 1995; Lee 1998; Lee 2000).

These shifts in the political rhetoric led to a change in the national historical narrative. By the late 1980s, the national narrative had begun to shift from the justification of Singapore's independence and existence as a sovereign nation-state, to framing the country's key historical events circa 1965 and after independence as they had been experienced and witnessed by the key leaders and founding fathers of the country. This narrative was a significant departure from the earlier narrative in its chronological approach. The period before 1965, and in particular the colonial period prior to 1942, continued to be regarded as important in that it provided the context for the formation of the national population base with its diverse cultural elements, while the historical narrative was firmly centred in the post-1965 era, with the process of nation-building in the areas of economy, society, foreign policy and defence as the centrepiece of the narrative. This narrative was complimented by a secondary narrative, in which the predominance of communalist tendencies during the late-colonial period in the post-WWII years, and into the two-year period when Singapore was a part of Malaysia (1963-1965), was eventually eclipsed by the development of a cohesive and ordered society in tandem with the economic and political developments that had taken place since Singapore's independence in 1965.

At the same time, the narrative assumed that there could only be one source of reliable information pertaining to the historical experience of the period in question – the national leaders of Singapore – and that all of the other sources lacked credibility. There could, therefore, not be

any other credible version of the past other than a Whig-dominated one (Loh 1998: 1).

This historical narrative continued to be formulated over the course of about twenty years, supported, during this process, by the publication of the history of various government agencies and departments, notably the Housing Development Board, the Ministry of Defence, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Wong and Yeh 1985; Yap 1990; Liu 2005). While these histories primarily provided the institutional experiences of Singapore's post-1965 history, they ultimately served to confirm the political rhetoric of the 1980s and the accounts given by the political leadership, consequently according further credibility to the conservative national narrative that had been formulated. These developments culminated in the final form of the second national narrative, depicted in two important state-sponsored histories – *The Singapore story [electronic resource]: overcoming the odds / a national education project by the Ministry of Information and the Arts* (MITA 1999), produced by the Ministry of Information and the Arts; and *Singapore: Journey to Nationhood* (Lee et. al. 1999), published by the National Archives of Singapore, a government statutory board under the purview of the Ministry of Information and the Arts.

While the second historical narrative was being completed, the rhetoric emanating from Singapore's political leadership had begun to change once again. By the early 1990s, Singapore's political leadership was undergoing a generational change. A new breed of technocrats had already assumed the political leadership of the country. Their individual reputations and legacies did not hinge on the posthumous success of the outcome of Singapore's separation and independence from Malaysia. Instead, their legacy would have to be determined by their success in steering Singapore on its next trajectory of development, particularly after the world economic recession of the mid-1980s, and in light of the new international economic context that was already developing, spurred on by the advances in communications technology by the 1990s, the emergence of China as a potentially important economy in Asia and the world, and the spectacular economic growth that was being experienced throughout much of Southeast Asia.

One of the earliest visions that emerged from this new generation of leaders was encapsulated in the government pamphlet entitled *The Next Lap* (Government of Singapore 1991). In it, the political leaders outlined the goal for the country towards the attainment of the 1984 Swiss standard of living by the year 2000. Due to the spectacular economic growth that Singapore was experiencing, this goal had been modified in the mid-1990s, to that of attaining a first-world living standard, comparable to cosmopolitan world cities like New York and London.

The political leadership also began to systematically consolidate Singapore's economy, aspiring to transform the country into an international service, financial and high-technology hub. Various reports in the *Straits Times* (1992-1996), portrayed Singapore as a potential hub of almost everything from aerospace and engineering, to scuba diving and fashion design. The political leadership called for a fundamental shift from placing the emphasis on Gross Domestic Product (the value of domestic economic activities) to Gross National Product (the sum of the value of domestic and international economic activities). This shift was in large part due to the shift in the world economy in the 1980s from an international economy still dominated by the nation-state to a more globally oriented economy driven by the international market, communications technology, and connections to the network of global cities. The political rhetoric initially called for Singapore to become a regional hub in Asia. This was then extended in the mid-1990s to Singapore becoming an international hub (Low 2004).

Part of the rhetoric for regionalising and internationalising Singapore meant that the new generation of political leaders no longer talked about the country in anomalous terms, instead focusing on how the regionalisation and internationalisation efforts could be sustained. These efforts and visions of Singapore's future have been framed within the context of having competed successfully against external competitors, rather than within the former context of Singapore as a political joke or quirk of history.

The political rhetoric regarding the social aspects of Singapore was changing as well. While the rhetoric had hitherto been about the assuaging of ethnic differences and the building up of a standardised national identity that was based on shared experiences in the pre-1965 and post-1965 eras, by the 1990s, it had shifted dramatically to one that permitted and even encouraged each of Singapore's major ethnic groups to preserve the cultural traits that still remained, and for Singaporeans to rediscover their cultural roots and linkages, much of which appeared to have been lost to the new generation of Singaporeans born in the post-1965 era.

As part of the regionalisation and internationalisation of Singapore and the rediscovery of the various ethnic roots of the people, cultural learning in Singapore was to change as well. This included the establishment of a museum in 1992 – the Asian Civilisations Museum – to showcase the cultural and historical backgrounds of the major ethnic groups in Singapore – Chinese, Malay/Muslims and Indians (Goh 1992). At the same time, Singapore's parliament approved a bill to set up the National Heritage Board, which was intended to be the state custodian of the heritage agencies of the country (Osman, Ibrahim, Fernandez and Ng 1993).

By the early 2000s, the rhetoric on culture had developed even further. Since 2004, the political leadership in Singapore has consistently emphasised the importance and virtue of being at home in two cultures, in other words, being bi-cultural. The argument thus far notes that, since Singapore's citizenry is comprised of the descendants of immigrants, Singapore's core elite should develop the ability to work well and be comfortable both in the Singapore context as well as in the land from which their forebears had come, namely China, India, the Malay Archipelago and the Middle East.

This rhetoric of bi-culturalism, although an extension of the earlier rhetoric that sought to encourage the rediscovery and retention of ancestral cultural traits, is distinct in its focus. Its ultimate goal is both inward, in that it seeks to establish or recover the various ethnic identities of Singaporeans, but also outward because it actively seeks to export Singaporeans abroad to establish linkages with the lands of Singaporeans' historical ethnicity, particularly in the economic arena, in order to further the political leadership's objective of regionalising and internationalising Singapore. In this regard, the political leadership has promoted the notion that the nurturing of bi-cultural characteristics amongst its population could be pursued at both the micro and macro levels – between Singapore and individual states or between Singapore and large entities, such as China, India and/or the Middle East.

Bi-culturalism, however, has another objective. While Singaporeans are being exhorted to become more effective bi-culturally, and to secure Singapore's external links with India, China and countries in the Middle East, the subtle expectation is that Singaporeans will accept the influx of immigrants, in line with the government's policy to enhance its population level through immigration, from these same places. Bi-cultural skills can be essential both when Singaporeans are abroad and at home, where the social fabric is expected to be in a formative flux over the next few decades.

The political rhetoric expounded by Singapore's new generation of leaders since the 1990s began affecting the national narrative in the early 2000s. Singapore's national narrative is poised to take on another form – that of a city-state playing the role of the intermediary between diverse countries and economies in the regional and international contexts. This narrative, which frames Singapore's historical experiences as a series of chronological developments that have subsequently led to the country's role as the nodal point within the mesh of networks that connected the various parts of Asia, was initially focused on the modern, or post-1819, period of Singapore's history. However, by the turn of the millennium, the narrative had developed into one that attempts to portray the island as the logical recipient of the mantle as the international city in Maritime Asia, which served both the regional and inter-

national contexts, with the chronological time-frame extending back in time, beyond the modern founding of Singapore in 1819, to the late thirteenth century AD, when the earliest documented settlement on the island was established.

This narrative is still in its early formative stage. Nonetheless, it has departed from the earlier, personality-based narrative, to one that appears to be framed within the larger context of regional and international forces and developments, almost devoid of human agency, and only with a tacit acknowledgement of human agency as a factor in affecting the outcome of key developments and events, and the trajectory of the historical experience. This is evident in the series of books published by the various national heritage agencies of Singapore (Miksic and Low 2004).

The part of the new national narrative that would encapsulate the rhetoric regarding society and social issues that has been articulated by the political leadership since the 1990s is still not being formulated. It may be possible to speculate what the form of this new narrative will take. In order to do so, the role of academic history, in the context of Singapore's political rhetoric and the eventual national narrative that has been produced since 1965, must be taken into consideration.

The Role of Academic Scholarship in the Construction of the National Historical Narrative

The translation of the political rhetoric into a national historical narrative, since 1965, has not been an immediate one-step process. In the previous two cycles of the formulation of the national narrative, it is apparent that there has been a period of ten years between the political rhetoric that first emerged and crystallised in the public arena and the national narrative as it has been written and published. Moreover, by the time the national narratives appeared in the public domain, the political rhetoric had already moved along a different trajectory. Thus it is obvious that the state has not directly dictated the version of Singapore's past that the members of the nation-state have been expected to adopt.

Instead, the process appears to involve an interim stage, whereby academic history writing played a crucial role in establishing the viability of adopting the political rhetoric as a framework or approach towards constructing a historical narrative of Singapore. This interim stage is evident from the first two national historical narratives that were developed in the late 1970s and 1990s respectively.

In the case of the first narrative, the political rhetoric was followed by academic scholarship on the history of Singapore, which includes Tregonning (1966 and 1972) and Turnbull (1977). Both historians, who

were teaching at the University of Malaya, the predecessor of the present-day National University of Singapore, Singapore's flagship university, in the immediate post-1965 years, argued for a modern history of Singapore, since 1819, as the only relevant period of Singapore's past in the understanding of its post-1965 experiences (Tregonning 1969: 14). Both scholars also argued for the inseparability of Singapore Island from the Malay Peninsula, and sought to frame Singapore's history within the larger context of British Malaya. Their scholarly writings became the basis upon which the first national narrative was constructed.

The second rhetoric and subsequent narrative, the interim period between the two, was represented by the research and publication of several important academic works by historians and sociologists. The most notable of these included *Malayan Union Controversy, A History of Singapore, Imagining Singapore* and *A Moment of Anguish* (Lau 1990 and 1998; Chew and Lee 1991; Ban, Pakir and Chee 1992). Most of the academic scholarship centred on the post-WWII period of Singapore's history up until its independence in 1965, the sociological studies of Singaporean society in the post-1965 era, and the first-hand accounts of the first generation of political leaders, formed a critical mass upon which the second national historical narrative was constructed. The writing and publication of the historical narrative in the late 1990s may have been accorded further urgency by comments first made by the Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong in 1995, and then again in 1996 by the Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, expressing a need for a new generation of young Singaporeans to learn the lessons about national survival and Singapore's fragility, and to be made aware of the new generation's lack of knowledge of Singapore's tumultuous recent history and the background of its independence. These comments are believed to have led to the formulation and launching of the National Education initiative by the Ministry of Education, which has become an essential aspect of the public education curricula from the primary to tertiary levels in Singapore (Ministry of Education).

The two series of scholarship, although embodying the respective political rhetoric that was being expressed at that time, were academically sound. The academic scholarship involved historians who conducted research and wrote on various aspects of the history of Singapore, often testing the themes of the political rhetoric, relating their work to these themes, or adopting the themes as plausible theoretical approaches. The resulting publications were then drawn upon, and the resulting national narratives were syntheses of the available scholarship that had emerged in response to the political rhetoric. This state of affairs could not have been achieved without the vital role played by academic scholarship in the early stages of research and scholarship.

While the third and current rhetorical theme has been fomenting since the early 1990s, a national historical narrative, framed around this third rhetorical theme, has thus far not been published. The academic circle has been producing a significant body of publications that are based, to a large extent, on the themes of regionalisation, internationalisation, and continuity, which have evolved over the long term. Peter Borschberg, Tan Tai Yong, John Miksic, Kwa Chong Guan and Derek Heng all argue for a history of Singapore in the long term as part of regional and international developments (Borschberg 2002, 2003 and 2004a; Heng 1999, 2001 and 2002; Miksic 2005; Kwa 2004: 124 – 146). The underlying argument proposes that Singapore has thus far not only been affected by regional and international events, but more importantly, that it has played a crucial role in affecting how these events developed. This has been argued not only from the land-based perspective of the port-settlement/port-city and nation-state, but also from the maritime perspective of regional and international strategic considerations, maritime navigation and global conflict.

The national narrative appears to be poised to make the change from the second narrative to the third narrative in the coming years. This imminent change is evidenced by the on-going preparation and publication of Singapore's past experiences as a port-city/city-state since the fourteenth century AD by various national heritage agencies, notably the Singapore History Museum and the National Archives of Singapore. These include a forthcoming publication, authored by Tan Tai Yong, Kwa Chong Guan and Derek Heng, entitled *Singapore: A Seven Hundred Year History*, to be published by the National Archives of Singapore. These publications, written by the same academic historians, have synthesised and simplified the academic works to make them more accessible for the general public. Nonetheless, these publications do not constitute the next national historical narrative. A final aspect of the political rhetoric – the social characteristics of Singaporeans in a city-state and world and regional city – is still in its formative stage in academic scholarship.

How the external cultural and social linkages of Singapore will be portrayed in the next historical narrative remains unclear. Academic scholarship, however, has begun to tackle this issue, and it is in the possible developments of this scholarship on this issue that the probable nature of the portrayal of Singapore's society in the new historical narrative may be ascertained.

Hybridisation or Bi-Culturalism: The Basis of the Next National Narrative

Significant strides have been made in the field of maritime history, particularly in the study of societies in the port-cities of Asia. Up until the early 2000s, however, most of these studies focused on colonial port-cities. It has only been in the last few years that a number of works examining the societies of pre-modern and early modern port-cities in Maritime Asia have been published. These works, while relying on a diverse array of textual records and anthropological data, have relied heavily on theoretical postulations.

In the context of the history of Singapore and its immediate region – the Melaka Straits region – several papers have been published, exploring the nature of port-city societies in the region during the pre-modern and early-modern periods (Miksic 2005; Reid 2006). Working under the assumption that the region's port-cities originally comprised a core group of migrants from the region itself, these papers argue that port-city populations that developed during the early-modern era at their peak, eventually included immigrants from both the immediate region and further afield, including China, the Indian subcontinent and parts of mainland Southeast Asia. Apart from their respective cultural and ethnic backgrounds that would have served as markers for the identification of sub-groups, at a higher level, the population in general may have regarded itself as a cohesive social group by identifying itself with the port-city's head of state. This is, some surmise, how the 'state' with its inherent political relationships and group identification was established.

The literature further argues, however, that some among the population were able to establish a sense of 'nation' over time. This development enabled this group to identify itself as an exclusive 'localised' social group, which would have been not unlike the not 'indigenous' to the port-city. This sense of 'nation' was arguably achieved through a process of hybridisation, where certain traits introduced by the immigrants were retained and integrated into the dominant culture of the region in which the port-city was located. The literature argues that the resulting hybrid culture became increasingly entrenched, eventually becoming a culture in its own right. Aspects of a social group that may undergo this kind of transformation include language, cuisine, and the appreciation of artisanal crafts.

It is interesting to note that the academic scholarship on Singapore and the Melaka Straits region, has closely followed the development of American scholarship on language and literature, specifically in the field of folklore studies. Hybridisation has, since the late 1990s, been one of the most important theoretical frameworks utilised by folklore

studies to understand migrant groups that have settled in areas where there may have been no pre-existing dominant social group or culture present (Kapchan and Strong 1999). The approach encompasses concepts such as *creolisation*, and examines, in particular, the hybridisation of migrant groups through the development of language and imagery.

Hybridisation as an approach towards understanding the population of a port-city depicts an influx of people and culture. Hybridisation seeks to reconstruct the indigenisation of an otherwise foreign social group, into a localised social group that may be recognised as distinct or unique from subsequent waves of immigration that may even have originated from the same ancestral land. In the case of Singapore, the pre-modern historical example that is highlighted is the resident Chinese population in Temasik, the fourteenth-century port-city located in the southern part of Singapore until the early fifteenth century (Su 1981: 213). These Chinese immigrants lived amongst the Temasik 'locals', and participated in international trade as Temasik-based traders. These Chinese are distinct, some have argued, from those who were based in China and who sailed to Southeast Asia on an annual basis.

It is not difficult to extend this model to the post-independence period of Singapore, and to draw similarities between the localised Chinese of Temasik and the Chinese population of the nation-state of Singapore, and between the Chinese traders of old and the present sojourning population of migrant workers in Singapore. Hybridisation is therefore a useful approach in understanding and explaining the construction of coherent city-state nations that are open to regional and international forces and groups.

Indeed, hybridisation was not ignored in the early political rhetoric in the immediate period before and after 1965. The concept of Malayanism encompassed the acceptance of the localisation of immigrant groups in Malaya, and the indigenisation of the people of Malaya by adhering to certain shared values that were drawn from the various social groups and the artificial construction of shared socialist values. David Marshall, Singapore's first Chief Minister, in the 1950s argued for the creation of a coherent social group of Singaporeans that was based on the assimilation of the key characteristics of the dominant social group in Singapore by the various ethnic groups represented in Singapore, even though it was not apparent which ethnic groups were being referred to (Barr 2003: 3). Similarly, in the early post-independence years, Singapore's political leaders attempted to construct a society based on the eventual combination of various cultural aspects of the social groups represented in Singapore.

However, as a framework or approach to the construction of Singapore's past at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the approach is completely out of synch with the present political rhetoric. More recent

academic scholarship on the population of the port-cities of Singapore
and the Melaka Straits region may, instead, reflect the scholarship's in-
tended audience. The study of societies in the early-modern port-cities
of Maritime Asia remains, at its core, a topic of discourse conducted
amongst historians at the international scholarly level. In this regard,
Reid and Miksic's research falls into a larger body of scholarship pub-
lished since the early 2000s, and which includes the work of scholars
such as Skinner, Blusse and others (Skinner 1996; Blusse and Fernan-
dez-Armesto, 2003). The audience of these works is not any country in
particular, but rather the field of Southeast Asian studies in general.

This is indicative of the various levels of scholarship on the history of
Singapore since the 1950s. There has been a significant amount of
scholarly output on the history of Singapore over the last fifty years. A
large proportion of this scholarship, however, did not have Singapore as
its primary target audience. Thus, although significant scholarly work
on the history of Singapore was produced by such historians as Carl
Trocki and Yen Ching Hwang in the 1960s and 1970s (Trocki 1979;
Yen 1976 and 1978), it was the scholarly works that explored Singa-
pore's history from the perspective of colonial history and decolonisa-
tion, which had the greatest impact on Singapore itself. Again, while
significant strides were made in exploring Singapore's past in the
1980s and 1990s by adopting the approach of people's history (subal-
tern) and the study of overseas ethnic communities (Warren 1986 and
1993; Dobbs, 2003), the work that has had the most impact in Singa-
pore remains studies that sought to illuminate the immediate pre- and
post-1965 years in the context of nation building.

Bearing in mind the present-day state of academic scholarship, how
can academic discourse and history resolve the issue of the bi-cultural-
ism that has evolved out of the political rhetoric, and provide a sound
academic basis upon which the national historical narrative can be con-
structed along these lines?

Current academic discourse on Singapore's society, which at least
purports to address Singapore's audience, does include work that seeks
to explore Singapore's social and cultural history from the bi-cultural
perspective. This discourse transcends the examination of the cultural
and social history of the various ethnic groups in Singapore as 'over-
seas' groups, and instead assumes that certain groups have portrayed
themselves as members of Singapore while at the same time belonging
to and operating in two distinct spheres – the sphere of Singapore, on
the one hand, and the ancestral homeland from which they had origi-
nated, on the other.

There are currently a number of scholars who are working on the
trans-national links of people based in Singapore. These include scho-
lars such as Mark Frost, Chua Ai Lin and Daniel Goh, and collectively,

their scholarship spans across different disciplines including history, English, and sociology. They examine the trans-national or multi-cultural nature of the domicile population in Singapore and the Malay Peninsula, specifically the Chinese Straits, as well as the direct implications that these groups have had on social activism and nationalism in Singapore since the mid-twentieth century. The studies to a large extent attempt to focus on the similarities between the historical precedents of bi-culturalism in Singapore society and the society of present-day Singapore. This approach has thus far only been successful in the post-1819 period of Singapore's history, where there is sufficient data for scholars to study, and to a certain extent, manipulate in order to test and advance the framework of bi-culturalism.

The state of this scholarship is still very much in a preliminary stage. The studies have thus far been based on individuals, with the implications extended to the ethnic group to which the individual belonged. Moreover, this research has focused almost entirely on the Chinese from the Straits. One of the latest examples of this type of scholarship is the 27 January 2007 conference entitled *Lim Boon Keng and the Straits Chinese: A Historical Re-Appraisal*, organised by the Department of History (National University of Singapore) and the National Library Board (Singapore). The study of an historical personality, as a representation of an entire ethnic group, or even Singapore's general population is tenuous. Such an approach would have to be revised to gain the necessary scholarly credibility before Singapore's government will adopt it as the basis for the construction of the national narrative.

No substantial or significant work on any other ethnic group, or individual from another ethnic group, with perhaps the exception of Munshi Abdullah, has been carried out along similar lines. The exclusiveness of the Chinese from the Straits in the study of bi-cultural traits and functions needs to be eradicated, and the model needs to be applied to other ethnic groups in Singapore, so that bi-culturalism will be a viable approach to framing Singapore's social history.

Moreover, the bi-cultural or external linkages explored by these studies cannot focus solely on Asia. The European colonial context from which a number of the ethnic groups in Singapore have derived a significant part of their cultures needs to be considered in the bi-cultural matrix as well. Bi-culturalism may have to be considered not just an Asian prerogative, but also one that includes the West.

Finally, and perhaps most critically, a major hurdle that these scholars will face is whether their approach to understanding the domiciled groups in Singapore and their representative personages should be one of 'bi-culturalism' or of 'hybridisation'. This dilemma has emerged because the scholars studying the Chinese from the Straits assume that this ethnic group was in effect culturally *creolised*, and thus, is not bi-

cultural. In other words, this ethnic group saw itself to a certain extent as unique, and not Chinese or Malay, even though they were able to operate within the Chinese and Southeast Asian island spheres. Furthermore, the terms 'hybridisation' and 'bi-culturalism' have become laden with significant implications in the current social discourse in Singapore. The former is seen as an academically acceptable approach, while the latter is seen as a term coined within the context of the current political rhetoric. This dilemma may be resolved if the implications of hybridisation and bi-culturalism are better defined.

The best studies on these two sociological concepts are those that have been conducted in Western scholarship, particularly in the US, where these two concepts were originally conceptualised. As was mentioned in an earlier section of this paper, hybridisation is a fairly recent approach developed in the field of folklore studies to explore the notion of identity, as it is manifested in aspects of a social group's culture. Thus, it is essentially an approach for the reconstruction of the identity of ethnic groups that may have had to assimilate cultural traits from the other groups with which it has had to interact.

Bi-culturalism, on the other hand, was a topic of discourse first raised in the field of education studies. It was postulated and then framed as an approach used in an attempt to understand how migrant groups in the US were able to become fluent in two languages – their native tongue and the tongue of their domicile country. Sociologists then used these studies to understand how migrant groups and individuals perceived and conducted themselves in the context of their domicile countries, the host community in which they operate and live, and their respective native communities within the domicile countries and communities (Paulston 1978). In other words, bi-culturalism was intended to be a framework for the understanding of social groups and individuals, while pertaining to their functions within a given social context.

In the discipline of sociology, bi-culturalism is no longer considered a viable approach for the study of social groups. Nonetheless, in the field of history, it remains a viable approach. In the context of Singapore and the writing of Singapore's history, the narrative may have to be constructed along the lines of representative history. In other words, the history of Singaporeans may be represented by the functions and experiences of individuals or representative social groups within the Singapore population. As an academic discourse, this approach lacks credibility. However, as a national discourse, it is possible for the population to imagine such a past, and to project its relevance onto their present-day circumstances. Academic historians may be able to provide the scholarship credibility via their research and writing on historic personalities of Singapore.

This narrative may possibly emerge, supported by a preliminary phase of academic scholarship in Singapore. The *National Biography Project*, is an on-going project under the auspices of the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, which seeks to collate information on key personalities from Singapore's past 200 years of history, and to publish literature on the lives of these individuals. This project is expected to include personalities from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. The project would eventually create the necessary critical mass of academically grounded profiles upon which the social aspect of the new national narrative can then be constructed.

As an example, the experiences of Lim Boon Keng, who was an actual individual and may have represented an extremely small ethnic group in Singapore known as the Straits Chinese, could be extended to represent the historical experiences of Singaporeans of migrant descent in general, and more specifically those belonging to the present-day Chinese segment of Singapore's population. They are like Lim Boon Keng, descended from migrant Chinese families, but have individual and shared experiences that are based on their residency in Singapore. Another example could be Munshi Abdullah, an early-nineteenth-century Malay scholar, who was firmly rooted in his native Malay culture, but developed a keen awareness of Western culture, which allowed him to operate effectively there so that he affected the Southeast Asian island and Malay worlds in a fundamental way in the early nineteenth century.

In both cases, the key to successfully historicising the bi-cultural traits they embodied, and to apply that to the reconstruction of the social aspect of the new national narrative, may be to depersonalise the individuals, so that any possible linkages to identity, specifically ethnic-based identity, would be secondary. These traits could then be synthesised and transformed into a singular narrative that would be generic and perceived as applicable to Singaporeans in general.

Conclusion

In an 11 June 2000 interview, Singapore's Foreign Minister George Yeo stated that Singapore needed to maintain an open-door policy regarding the influx of foreigners, so that the country's economy could remain viable at the international level. He also highlighted that the result of that policy has been that Singapore has once again become a migrant society, with one in three new Singaporeans (citizens or permanent residents) being of foreign origin, and that one in four local marriages are between a Singaporean and a foreigner. As Singapore continues to develop along this trajectory – internationalisation of the economy and ci-

tizenry – its national historical narrative will have to be recast to create a direct relevance and bearing of the past on the present-day context.

Current academic scholarship concerning the history of Singapore has, by and large, successfully reframed Singapore's economic and political history to address the first of these concerns. The chronology has even been extended to include the pre-1819 period, back to the fourteenth century, to illustrate the continuity and longevity of the international nature of Singapore's macro-level economic and political histories.

The challenge for academic scholarship, at this point is to adopt a socio-scientific approach to the study of the history of Singaporeans that would ultimately be viable for adoption by the state as the appropriate way to reconstruct the new historical narrative. This will have an impact on the larger collective memory of Singaporeans, which may ultimately determine if the academic scholarship speaks to a larger, more general home audience, as opposed to a more scholarly discourse on the history of Singapore.

3 Gateway and Panopticon:
Singapore and Surviving Regime Change
in the Nineteenth Century Malay World

Koh Keng We

Introduction

The 19th-century history of Singapore has often been situated within the
territorial contours of the present-day nation-state, or that of the British
Empire in Southeast Asia. These historical narratives focused on Singa-
pore's commercial success and cosmopolitanism as the basis for its im-
portance within the British imperial system and the moulding of the fu-
ture nation-state. As Wong's (2003) detailed study of Singapore's trade
before 1869 has shown, the commercial success of Singapore depended
very much on its connections to other parts of Southeast Asia and the
world.[1] Studies of Islamic modernist and reform movements in the
nineteenth and twentieth centuries have also shown how Singapore
functioned as an important gateway for the movement of ideas and peo-
ple, be they pilgrims on the *haj*, religious teachers, or students, both be-
tween different parts of the archipelago and between the archipelago,
the Middle East, and the Indian Ocean littorals (Roff 1980; Laffan
2003). The same could be said of Chinese business networks (Trocki
1990, 2005) and Chinese modernization and reform movements, sub-
sequently nationalist, as they used Singapore as an important node for
similar flows (Godley 1977; Yen 1986; Henley 2003).

  The history of Singapore can also be located in the broader category
of 'colonial port cities' as posited as a heuristic ideal-type category by
Basu (1985) in the collection of essays he edited on *The Rise and Growth
of Colonial Port Cities in Asia*, where he outlined a possible comparative
Asian approach to the phenomenon in terms of 'the city-hinterland re-
lationships, morphogenesis, and the interactions between indigenous
elites', as well as questions of the resilience of indigenous economic, so-
cial, and political structures and systems, and the impact of Western
European intervention. Subsequent attempts to synthesize the study of
Asian port cities, such as the two volumes edited by Frank Broeze
(1989, 1997), have focused on similar themes, highlighting the impor-
tance of the Asian environment and pre-European/colonial urban forms

and hinterland/'littoral' configurations (and the diversity of historical and geographical contexts as well as morphology and environments), as well as different conceptualizations of the 'hinterland-foreland' matrix, while delving into the question of Western influence and change during the colonial period.

The British port of Singapore was similar in many ways to the Asian port cities studied in these volumes, both prior to and during the Portuguese and Dutch periods of expansion in the archipelago from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries. It functioned as a gateway not only in terms of commodity and people flows, but also for 'external ideas, cultural trends and technological influences' (Reid 1997). Yet, it was also different. In many pre-colonial port-polities, politics and trade were inextricably linked, in as much as economic exchange was intimately related to cultural and political exchange (Kathirithamby-Wells & Villiers 1990).[2] This was the case even for the port of Melaka under Portuguese and Dutch regimes, and various European-controlled port towns from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries.[3] British Singapore was somewhat an anomaly in the Malay world in this respect, in that the administration of the port-town was not directly interested in conducting the trade in the monopsonistic[4] or monopolistic manner of earlier European powers[5], or even in taxing such trade.[6]

The founding of Singapore, the division of Anglo-Dutch spheres of influence, and what was fundamentally a division of politics and trade in the new port and its attitude towards its environs, especially after the cessation of the Company monopoly in the China trade in 1833 (Turnbull 1977: 35), raises interesting questions about its relations to the hinterland, both on the peninsula and on the Dutch side of the border. The abovementioned studies all emphasize the importance of placing Singapore's history within broader regional and global contexts, not only economically, but also politically and culturally.[7] If Singapore's position as a regional entrepot by the mid-nineteenth century has become an accepted fact, another dimension remains understudied, namely the role of Singapore in the politics of colonial expansion and regime change (Blusse 2005) within the archipelago.

Singapore and the nineteenth-Century Malay World: Parameters of the Study

The establishment of a British port in Singapore in 1819 was seen as the starting point of the island's 'modern' history.[8] Thereafter, with the Anglo-Dutch Treaty of 1824, the histories of Singapore and the Riau-Lingga-Natuna archipelagos, now under the rubric of Riau-Lingga and its dependencies, came to diverge, with that of the Temenggong family

forming another trajectory through their creation of a new state to the north of Singapore, which took on the name of the old kingdom, Johor. Nevertheless, it was the 'success' of British Singapore and peninsular Johor under the Temenggong that attracted more attention than the latter's relatives in the Dutch Residency of Riau Lingga.[9] This chapter attempts to link the history of Singapore to the history of elite families of the former kingdom of Johor. The comparison of these families' strategies has been examined in another essay. Here, I shall focus on the role played by Singapore in the strategies of survival of three elite families from the kingdom of Johor in the face of Anglo-Dutch imperial expansion and regime change within the nineteenth and early twentieth century Malay world. The strategies of each family not only reflected their different visions of region and the world, and their places within it, but also different dimensions and phases of Singapore's growth as a regional entrepot and imperial centre in the nineteenth century, as well as changing regional and global imperial environments and the consolidation of the Anglo-Dutch frontier through the co-operation of the two European regimes.

The Sultan in Lingga, Tengku Hussein (later the Sultan of Singapore), the Yam Tuan Muda (henceforth YTM) and the Temenggong were the main figures of authority in the kingdom of Johor whose fortunes, and those of their families, came to be changed by the British founding of Singapore in 1819 and the 1824 Anglo-Dutch Treaty of London, albeit in different ways. The Temenggong and Sultan Hussein relinquished all claims to the island of Singapore in return for a lump-sum payment and a stipend from the English East India Company, which lasted only through their lifetimes (Chew & Lee 1991: 29; Turnbull 1989: 1-34; Trocki 1979: 53-55). They effectively lost 'all legitimate claim to status and political power in Singapore' (Trocki 1979: 55). Their claims on the islands to the south of Singapore and, in the case of the latter, over the kingdom of Johor as a whole were not recognized by the British officials in Singapore, with the latter's government in London acknowledging Dutch influence in those islands in the Riau-Lingga-Natuna archipelago. They enjoyed the protection of the East India Company only if they remained on the island. On the Dutch side of the border, the YTM in Pulau Penyengat in Bintan and the Sultan of Lingga were recognised in their suzerainty over the Riau and Lingga archipelagos, including the islands that had previously belonged to the Temenggong as a fiefdom, while the Dutch government convinced them to abandon any claims they had on Singapore and the peninsula of Johor.

What emerged were two contrasting systems of imperialism. The British system was primarily commercial based on the older system of controlling trade routes and the commerce in strategic commodities. Singapore functioned in that role of a link in the China trade, at least

until the Company officially lost its monopoly in 1833. Its imperial role was defensive, in ensuring that the Dutch or their allies did not exceed their recognized bounds. It was certainly not territorial. Connections and traffic mattered more. The Dutch, on the other hand, envisioned a territorial archipelagic state similar to what the British had achieved in India (Tarling 1958).

Older geopolitical parameters and hierarchies persisted after the territorial division. The Temenggong and Sultan Hussein continued to exercise rights on the islands south of Singapore, such as Galang and Karimun, leading ultimately to the Karimun War between the followers of Sultan Hussein and the YTM and his forces assisted by Dutch warships. The end of the 1827 Karimun War coincided with the resolution of differences over the interpretation of the 1824 Treaty by the European governments and their agents in the archipelago (Tarling 1958). While the 'border' increasingly became a reality, it continued to be 'porous' (Tagliacozzo 2005) as royalty and nobility, merchants, labourers, *orang laut*, and other mobile groups continued to cross this cartographical line.

The redrawing of political borders also changed the axis of competition and the terms of the 'game'. While the Temenggong and Tengku Hussein had aided the British against their adversaries, their families began to compete for control over peninsular Johor and the trade in key commodities, such as *gutta percha*. Similarly, relations between the YTM and the Sultan of Lingga families also began to sour as the latter sought to transcend the strictures of control that successive YTMs had sought to impose in Lingga, while claiming their right to rule on behalf of the ruler. The families on each side of the border looked to those on the other side for assistance and support in dealing with their rivals in their respective spheres. If the consequences of the 1824 treaty varied for these families, they found themselves increasingly marginalised from their respective fields of authority within the newly reconfigured political and territorial parameters.

The families of the Temenggong, the YTM, and the Sultan of Lingga adopted different strategies in response to the encroachment of and marginalisation by the new colonial 'regimes' and new rivals within the newly reconstituted fields of power. Each group sought to resist the new European regimes of domestication, by subverting them through travel, and in doing so, articulating alternative identities and socio-political imaginaries. They ranged from the revival of the geographical and social parameters of the old kingdom of Johor by the family of the Sultan in Lingga, the tapping of regional and trans-regional networks of Islamic dissemination and practice (and later Pan-Asianism) by the YTM family in Riau, and finally to European and Asian circuits of royalty on the part of the Temenggong in Johor. Constituting an important space

outside of the traditional *kerajaan* system in the peninsula and archipe-
lago and, for the YTM (Riau) and Sultan (Lingga) families, outside the
Dutch regime, and given its non-interventionist stance prior to 1874,
Singapore became an important recourse for these elite families in their
bids for autonomy, and their concomitant attempts to attract capital, la-
bour, and ideas for their various enterprises.

The strategies and fortunes of the Temenggong, YTM, and Sultan
(Lingga) families highlighted this Janus-faced role of Singapore as en-
trepot and imperial 'panopticon' (to borrow a phrase of Bentham's and
Foucault's)[10] in the processes of regime change within the nineteenth
century archipelago. With its rise as an entrepot in the first half of the
nineteenth century, taking over the role previously occupied by ports
like Riau and Melaka, Singapore provided access to capital, labour, com-
modities, networks, information, and ideas central to their attempts to
create an autonomous economic, cultural or political base of power and
authority. The convergence of shipping, people, and commodities
meant that it became a gateway for different global (or trans-regional)
cultural and ideological flows, connecting different parts of the archipe-
lago to each other and to global centres of authority and knowledge,
such as the Ottoman court, the Islamic reformist centres in the Middle
East, and Japan. It also served, at the same time, as an imperial outpost
on the Anglo-Dutch border overseeing British interests in the peninsu-
lar and its environs vis-à-vis those of the Dutch and their allies, as well
as other 'foreign' powers and agents.

The different roles played by Singapore in the strategies of survival of
these elite families reflected its straddling of two imperial systems in
the first half of the nineteenth century (the British commercial mode
and the Dutch territorial mode), the transition between two different
types of British imperial formations on the peninsula in the course of
the century, as well as the tensions between the abovementioned roles.
Ultimately, the crystallisation of the Anglo-Dutch frontier as well as re-
gional and global imperial relations in the world-system in the course
of the nineteenth century meant that the possibility of 'escape' from the
colonial strictures offered by Singapore's access to the 'outside' became
increasingly dim for these elite families.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, the Sultanate of Riau-Ling-
ga and the YTM office had been abolished by the Dutch colonial autho-
rities, with the leaders of these families going into exile in Singapore.
The state of Johor on the peninsula was formally incorporated into the
British Unfederated Malay States with the appointment of an Advisor.
The efforts of these elites to turn to Turkey, Japan, and London respec-
tively were to prove futile ultimately.

Sultan Mahmud: Old Strategies in a New World

In 1858, representatives of the Dutch government in Batavia delivered a decree to Sultan Mahmud, who was then in Singapore, deposing him as the ruler of the Dutch Residency of Riau-Lingga and its dependencies. He was deposed because of his recalcitrance in ignoring warnings from the Governor-General in Batavia and the Dutch Resident in Riau not to venture across the border into Singapore and Trengganu, and intervening in the politics there. In the official Dutch accounts, he had not only neglected the affairs of his kingdom, but also caused embarrassment to the Dutch government in the face of British protests over his travels to the east coast of the peninsula (Matheson 1970; Raja Ali Haji 1982: 275ff.; Van der Putten 2001).

He took after his father, Sultan Muhammad, in his intransigence against the YTM family. Since the time of his grandfather, Sultan Abdul Rahman, successive YTMs had controlled the administration of Lingga through their intermediaries in Daik (Raja Ali Haji 1982: 219). The alliance between the YTM Raja Jafar and Dutch colonial government in 1818, although tenuous at times, resulted in the consolidation of the former's position vis-à-vis the Temenggong and Tengku Hussein, who found ready allies in Raffles and Farquhar, the officers of the English East India Company commissioned with founding a settlement south of Melaka.

While the families of the YTM and the Sultan in Lingga were aligned with the Dutch against the Temenggong-Tengku Hussein-British in the contest over Singapore and indirectly, the succession to the throne of Johor, the Anglo-Dutch Treaty in 1824 and the Karimun War of 1827 brought an end to this 'Paper War'. The Anglo-Dutch delineations paved the way for a new axis of rivalry within the new geopolitical parameters imposed by the British and the Dutch governments in Europe. The period between the 1830s and the 1880s saw a contest between the YTM and Sultan families for the control of Riau and Lingga, in which the Dutch colonial administration, at least until the 1860s, seemed to have taken the side of the YTM family, not least due to the proximity of Pulau Penyengat and Tanjung Pinang, but also due to good relations between several YTMs and Dutch Residents (Van der Putten 1995, 2001).

Singapore figured conspicuously in the strategies of Sultan Mahmud of Lingga as he sought to bypass the regime imposed by the YTM family in Lingga (Raja Ali Haji 1982; Matheson 1970). Sultan Mahmud's frequent visits to Singapore were discouraged by both the YTM and his circle, and the Dutch administration in Riau. They accused the Sultan of leaving his court too often and neglecting his duties as ruler, while the YTM also accused him of mixing too much with non-Muslims, to the extent of taking a European mistress, and living an un-Islamic life-

style (Matheson 1970; Raja Ali Haji 1982; Netscher 1870; Van der Putten 2001).

Sultan Mahmud saw the Dutch Residents in Tanjung Pinang as favouring the YTM family and sought to circumvent Riau by dealing directly with Singapore and the peninsula. The Dutch did not have an official in Lingga prior to 1870, and depended very much on the YTM in their everyday dealings with the Sultan in Lingga. Given the proximity of Singapore to Lingga, its importance as the regional entrepot, and its position as the centre of the British imperial presence in the archipelago, Singapore provided the promise of economic and social autonomy, possibly translating into political autonomy. His father was recorded as having visited Singapore, at the same time as the Sultan of Selangor. Sultan Abdul Rahman, his grandfather, had travelled to Trengganu when he was frustrated with the British founding of Singapore and the recognition of his brother as Sultan, coupled with the YTM Raja Jafar's inability to properly install him with the proper regalia, then held by the Engku Puteri.[11]

In Singapore, Sultan Mahmud had become closely associated with a Parsee merchant, Cursetjee, and the prominent European merchant, W. H. Read, who was later to become the consul for the Dutch in Singapore. Both Cursetjee and Read were members of the Brethren of the Lodge Zetland in the East, with Read occupying a particularly high position within the lodge (Buckley 1967: 521-522). The latter was also heavily involved in investments in the peninsula and was a vehement opponent of the Temenggong family in the latter's interventions on the peninsula. He was also believed to have been the one who initiated Sultan Mahmud into the abovementioned Masonic Lodge. The Sultan also concluded agreements with European merchants for the exploitation of tin on the island of Singkep. In 1852, he had visited Singapore again to discuss the extraction of coal deposits in Lingga (Matheson 1970: 138). It was in Singapore that Sultan Mahmud obtained the blueprint for his European-style residence in Riau, as well as the Chinese labour for building it (Suwardi 1990; Hijjas 2005: 269).

Nevertheless, Sultan Mahmud's strategies were neither new nor unique. His ties with Read and Cursetjee were part of a broader pattern that saw rival chiefs and rulers in the west coast peninsula states turning to merchants in the Straits Settlements for capital, labour, arms and access to the British colonial administration in Singapore in their political contests and wars. European and Chinese capital, as well as Chinese labour and fighting men, had been recruited to develop tin districts in Perak, Selangor, and Sungei Ujong since the 1840s, and the conflicts between rival factions of Chinese merchants and secret societies in the Straits Settlements were intimately tied to those on the west coast of the peninsula (Khoo 1972).

The Straits Settlements, including Singapore, became important financiers of politics, trade, and production on the peninsula. Individual merchants or cliques and syndicates played important roles in the politics of the region, as politics remained intimately connected to trade despite the non-interventionist imperial policy of the British administration. Singapore had a unique political economy on the archipelago in how political power became detached from trade. As such, it provided access to important materials of state building without entailing political subjugation, in contrast to the situation on the Dutch side of the border.

Besides Singapore, the Sultan also travelled frequently to Trengganu and Pahang, claiming to be visiting his kin in these places. His mother was a princess from Trengganu, who married his father when he had followed Sultan Abdul Rahman to the kingdom for refuge in 1820. This was part of an older pattern of politics, based on extended familial ties between royal families in the Sultanate of Johor and the royal families of the polities on the peninsula, such as Trengganu and Pahang. The rulers of Trengganu in the eighteenth century aided the Malay factions and the Sultan against the Bugis YTM and his followers in the kingdom (Vos 1992; Raja Ali Haji 1982). By maintaining his connections to this circuit of kin in Singapore, Pahang, and Trengganu, Sultan Mahmud was invoking an older paradigm and network centred on the kingdom of Johor. He trying to reclaim his rank and status within the broader Malay world as the Sultan of the old Johor, rather than the ruler of Lingga to which the Bugis YTM regime and the Dutch colonial state were keen to pin him to.

Reports from newspapers and contemporary accounts in the 1840s emphasised the status enjoyed by the Sultans of Lingga in the peninsula and the surrounding coasts of Borneo and Sumatra (Milner 1982: 67), in contrast to the family of Sultan Hussein in Singapore. Even the *Tuhfat al-Nafis*, a text critical of Sultan Mahmud (d. 1864), suggested, perhaps through hyperbole, that in a later period, 'any person he met joined him', when he moved through Trengganu galvanizing support for his protégé in the Pahang War (Raja Ali Haji 1982: 307). The Temenggong in Singapore also felt the need to visit the Sultan in Lingga and the YTM in Riau to pay his respects and for confirmation of his title in 1841, even after his installation by the Governor of Singapore and the Bendahara of Pahang. In doing so, he was both invoking the old Johor hierarchy, while denying the legitimacy of Tengku Ali, the heir to Sultan Hussain. The latter, too, had visited Lingga and offered his 'inheritance' on the peninsula to Sultan Mahmud, even as he competed with the Temenggong for the territory (Milner 1982: 67).

However, his actions were read differently by the British in Singapore, who saw his intervention in Pahang and Trengganu as an infringement of the 1824 Treaty by a vassal of the Dutch colonial state. As

British suspicions increased about the Sultan's visits to Singapore, and his use of these opportunities to influence the politics of Trengganu, he was to exacerbate the tensions further in October 1856. He had ventured to Trengganu after saying farewell to the British governor in Singapore and claiming that he was returning to Riau. In response to British protests, the Dutch Governor-General in Batavia had written two letters to Sultan Mahmud warning him not to venture to Singapore or the east coast of the peninsula, threatening him in the second letter with the loss of his kingdom and Dutch protection if he did so again. Sultan Mahmud paid no heed to the warning (Matheson 1970; Netscher 1870).

The final straw came in 1857. In the midst of an impasse in the succession to the YTM office, in which he had procrastinated on naming a successor because he did not agree with the YTM family's candidate, he had attempted to do away with the office by naming an outsider from Singapore as his representative and demanding the revenues of Riau be paid to him. When he did not get his way, the Sultan decided to travel to Singapore, against the advice of the Dutch Resident and the YTM family, without resolving this issue. This direct challenge to Dutch authority forced the government in Batavia to take the step of formally deposing him (Netscher 1870; Raja Ali Haji 1982: 291-292; Matheson 1970: 123; Van der Putten 2001).

Sultan Mahmud had remained in Singapore after his deposing, staying with the Temenggong, and attempting to seek the mediation of the British with the Dutch in Riau. The refusal of the British administration to intervene on his behalf made him turn to the east coast to try to build a new base there. Pahang was the fief of the Bendahara, the 'Malay' (as opposed to Bugis) chief minister, and Sultan Mahmud, on the basis of his claim to be the descendent of the Johor rulers, was invoking his higher rank as ruler in the old hierarchy of Johor. He moved to Pahang, and tried to establish himself there by supporting Wan Ahmad in a power struggle against his uncle and nephew.

Failing to obtain the support of the British or the ruler of Trengganu for his protégé, the Sultan turned to the ruler of Siam. The support that had seemingly been provided to him by King Mongkut in bringing the Sultan back to Kelantan and Trengganu in British warships alarmed the British government in Singapore (Matheson 1970: 124-125; Milner 1982: 53-71). It led to the dispatch of British warships to Trengganu, and ultimately the bombardment of the capital after the failure of the ruler of Trengganu to hand over Sultan Mahmud and his followers (Milner 1982: *ibid.*; Matheson 190: *ibid.*). Wan Ahmad was ultimately victorious over the incumbent Bendahara, but Sultan Mahmud was never given the recognition he desired. Smuggling himself back into Pahang via Singapore (disguised as a sailor), the Sultan eventually died in Pahang in 1864, exhausted and disappointed.

Sultan Mahmud's strategies of survival and 'career' highlighted the Janus-faced roles of Singapore as 'gateway' and 'imperial outpost' (or 'panopticon') in a period of transition in the Malay world. As an entre-pot under British rule, it provided access to sources of European and Chinese merchant capital, commodities, and manpower for rulers and chiefs from the Dutch sphere of influence and the peninsula 'states'. Even as the British authorities in Singapore and the Straits Settlements sought to minimize Company intervention in local or regional politics, the merchant communities and labour networks, especially the Chinese *kongsi*, were involved in prospective ventures at the invitation of and in cooperation with local rulers or chiefs. Taking the case of Selangor and Perak, for example, multi-ethnic coalitions (backed by merchant capital from the Straits Settlements) battled for control of tin territory and power (Khoo 1972: 71-85; Ho 2002: 12). On the Dutch side of the bor-der, rulers turned to Singapore for independent sources of finance, arms and ammunition, and political support.

The contrast in imperial visions between the British and the Dutch administrations in the archipelago made Singapore an important auton-omous space outside both the strictures of the *kerajaan* and the Dutch territorial empire, providing refuge as well as resources for rulers, chiefs, and Chinese kongsis in their attempts to create or maintain their claims to authority and power. Singapore and the Straits Settlements created a situation of fluidity in the peninsula, and to a certain extent, on the Dutch side of the border, because of its free trade policy and that of political non-intervention, except where the Company's and national interests were impinged upon (especially encroachment by other powers). While it generally discouraged and sought to prevent support for such conflicts on the Dutch border by British subjects or residents on Singapore, flows of materials, money, and people from or via the is-land and port continued. The merchant communities even clamoured for Company intervention to secure their investments and interests in these enterprises (Khoo 1972; Mills 1966: 174-219).

The period of fluidity in hierarchies and boundaries on the peninsula funded by the Straits Settlements coincided with the crystallization of the Anglo-Dutch border between the late 1820s and the 1860s. None-theless, Sultan Mahmud's attempts to ignore these divisions in his invo-cation of the parameters of the kingdom of Johor through his travels re-sulted in the re-affirmation of the Anglo-Dutch border and the geogra-phical spheres of influence delineated in 1824. The Anglo-Dutch co-operation to stop Sultan Mahmud's travels to Trengganu and Pahang, as well as the Anglo-Siamese agreements over their respective spheres on the east coast of the peninsula also reflected the crystallisation of An-glo-Siamese boundaries, soon after the Bowring Treaty of 1855. It led to the diminishing of amorphous spaces between polities or rival imperial

spheres and their borders that were so characteristic of the older polities, a process covered in the works of Thongchai (1993) and Tagliacozzo (2005).

It paralleled a shift in Dutch imperial policy from the ambivalence surrounding Sumatra and other areas along the Anglo-Dutch border in the 1840s to a more aggressive policy towards the rulers whom they considered as vassals in the border zone and against other European intrusions. The projects of James Brooke in Sarawak and Labuan, and the adventures of Gibson and Wilson in Sumatra, together with a series of revolts against the Dutch overlordship in Palembang, Bangka, Jambi, West Borneo, and Banjarmassin that broke out in the late 1840s and the late 1850s, made the Dutch East Indies government particularly apprehensive of recalcitrant behaviour by 'native' rulers in the reifying of what Tagliacozzo (2005) had called the 'border arc' between the Dutch and British spheres during the first half of the nineteenth century.

Growing British and Chinese commercial involvement in the politics on the peninsula also led to the intensification of calls from within the mercantile communities in Singapore for British intervention on the peninsula to protect British interests there, especially against the intrusion of other European powers liaising with these states or agents acting on their behalf. Sultan Mahmud's strategies to revive the older Malay world political parameters was perceived as such a threat, although Sultan Mahmud was not the only ruler or traditional elite to continuously cross the new Anglo-Dutch border.[12] His visits to Pahang and Trengganu, first as a Dutch vassal, and subsequently as an envoy for the Siamese ruler in Bangkok were seen as 'outside' attempts to interfere in the politics of the peninsula.

Sultan Mahmud was a victim of the transition between the old and the new 'world' created by Anglo-Dutch delineations of their respective spheres of influence. His attempts to revive these contours failed miserably in the face of the gradual crystallization of the Anglo-Dutch border and Anglo-Siamese negotiations concerning the east coast of Malaya. Ultimately, his use of his genealogical credentials and ties to the ruling family of Johor proved to be insufficient to secure him the title of Sultan in Pahang and his reinstatement as ruler there.

The YTM Family: Cosmopolitan Singapore and the Gateways to Asian Modernities

Despite the criticisms of Sultan Mahmud's frequent visits to Singapore and his consorting with non-Europeans in Singapore in the *Tuhfat al-Nafis*, the YTM family's fate and fortunes were to become increasingly drawn towards the port-city in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

The meaning and forms of these connections were rather different from those of the Sultan. While economic motives were strong, it was inseparable from the growing significance of Singapore in the late nineteenth century as a centre for Islamic learning and publishing, as well as a conduit for the flows of ideas, commodities and people between the Middle East and the archipelago, from pilgrims to newspapers and literature. The port-city was also later to become an important centre for early 'Malay' nationalism and the Malay language press, as well as the creation of a Malay-Muslim public sphere.

Islamic knowledge networks have historically followed the major trade routes linking the Middle East, India, and Southeast Asia. The ruling elites in Southeast Asian port polities have played an important historical role in the patronage of Islam, especially in the promotion of Islamic learning and practice, and in the production and dissemination of religious knowledge. The perceived importance of Islamic knowledge as cultural capital was evident in the major pre-nineteenth century port-polities in Pasai, Melaka, Aceh, northern Java, Banten, and Makassar between the thirteenth and seventeenth centuries, and Palembang, Pontianak, and Banjarmassin in the eighteenth century (Azra 2003; Andaya 1993). What distinguished Singapore from these earlier ports were its non-Muslim administrative elites and official policy towards religion and Islam in particular, and its free trade policy.

As Roff (1967) and Milner (1995) have pointed out, the rise of Singapore as a centre for Islamic reformism and Sufi teaching in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century was due not only to its importance as a commercial and shipping centre for the diasporic trading networks from the Middle East and west Indian coast, and its importance as a staging point for the *haj*, but equally importantly, to the relative lenient policy the Straits Settlements governments adopted, prior to 1902, towards the activities of Islamic teachers, authors, clubs, and publishing activities in these port towns, in contrast to the suspicion accorded to it by authorities in the Dutch East Indies, and the attempts of the Malay polities on the peninsula to domesticate religious teachers and functionaries within the traditional political hierarchies (Roff 1967: 32-55; Milner 1995).

Within this context, culture, religion, and history, in particular Islam and Malay language, grammar and history, became important dimensions in the YTM family's strategy of survival under the Dutch colonial regime. The YTM family elite was transformed from famed warriors defending the kingdom to exemplary Islamic leaders and experts not only in Islamic doctrine and theology, but also Malay language, history, and culture (Raja Ali Haji 1982; Barnard 1998). They took on the role of cultural brokers to consolidate their position within the new Dutch colonial regime and to resist attempts by Sultan Mahmud and his father to by-

pass them and undermine their position. They mediated between the Middle East, other regional centres of Islamic knowledge in the archipelago, and their kingdom/Residency, in the transmission and translation of Islamic ideas, doctrine, and practice. They played a similar role between the Dutch and local/regional repositories of Malay world history and language. Where necessary, they came to 'invent' tradition, in Hobsbawm's sense, in order to legitimise and justify their roles as regents.

The YTM family had benefited the most territorially from the 1824 Anglo-Dutch Treaty. They claimed authority over the islands formerly considered the fief of the Temenggong. Nevertheless, successive YTMs were to face the gradual encroachment of the Dutch colonial state into what they considered to be their 'traditional' fields of authority, such as the collection of revenues and the administration of Bintan. The new 'border' also reoriented the axes of contestation in the region. The rivalry between the Temenggong and YTM families had defined the politics of the kingdom of Johor since the late eighteenth century, despite the marriages between the families. Under the new European regimes, and delineation of spheres, a new axis emerged, with the YTM in Riau and Sultan in Lingga struggling over the control of Lingga, Reteh, and the Natunas.

The YTM family turned instead to cultural capital to create a basis of authority that was independent of both the Dutch colonial administration (financially and politically) and the Sultan in Lingga (for legitimation) respectively, even if the YTM office was dependent on both for its legitimacy and survival.[13] Successive YTMs and members of their families became important intermediaries for the Dutch in the accumulation of manuscripts and other materials pertaining to the history and traditions of the kingdom, partly to be used for the administration of Riau-Lingga, and partly to be used in the teaching and learning of Malay in the colonial service. On the basis of these accumulated materials and the networks formed with repositories of such texts and knowledge in the western archipelago, the YTM family elite became producers of knowledge pertaining to Malay history, tradition, language, and literature, with Raja Ali Haji's works being published in Dutch journals, and the same person applying to the Dutch government for a printing press (Van der Putten 1995, 1997 & 2001; Matheson & Andaya 1971; Andaya 1977; Raja Ali Haji 1982).

Pulau Penyengat, the residence of the YTM family and circle opposite the Dutch fort of Tanjung Pinang, developed into an important centre of Islamic learning and practice. Under successive YTMs beginning from Raja Jafar, efforts were made to ensure closer adherence to Islamic law and Islamic tenets of behaviour and dress in the everyday life. Islamic teachers from Mekka and the archipelago were invited to stay

and teach in Pulau Penyengat. The *Naqsbandiyyah* tarekat or Sufi school was established in Pulau Penyengat by the leaders of the YTM family, with Raja Abdullah, himself YTM between 1857 and 1858, recognised as the leader of the 'brotherhood' (Raja Ali Haji 1982: 320).

The first half of the nineteenth century also saw the first members of the YTM family undertake the *haj,* including, among others, Raja Ahmad, Raja Abdullah (who had studied in Mekka and the Middle East while on the *haj* there), and Raja Abdullah's son, who died during a *haj*, while accompanying Sheikh Ismail (Raja Ali Haji 1982: 284). Their aspirations in becoming important producers and translators of Islamic knowledge were evident in Raja Ali Haji's attempts to secure a printer and to start a school in Pulau Penyengat (Van der Putten 2006).

Singapore played an important role in linking the YTM family and Pulau Penyengat to regional and global networks of Islamic learning and knowledge. The global outlook in the conception of Islam and the ecumene was evident in the growing traffic to Mekka for the pilgrimage and the interest in news from the Middle East. Raja Ali Haji was, in the 1850s, following the news of the Crimean war, and saw it as a *jihad* or holy war (Andaya 1977: 129). The advent of steam shipping, the opening of the Suez Canal, and the designation of Singapore as a major coal station for the British Royal Navy effectively transformed Singapore into the main port in the western archipelago in the era of steam (Wong 1991: 41-65); Tagliacozzo 2005). Singapore became an important node for pilgrims, students, teachers, and other religious experts travelling from between the archipelago and the Middle East and the Indian Ocean littoral. Famous teachers, such as Sheikh Ismail, moved between the Temenggong's residence in Singapore and Riau. By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the YTM family became closely associated with the Sufi and reformist networks in Singapore (Raja Ali Haji 1982: 284).

Just as the spread of Islam and movements of Islamic revivalism had followed the trade and shipping routes that linked the Indian Ocean littoral with the Java Sea in the earlier centuries (Riddell 2001; Gordon 2001; Azra 2003), Singapore's rise as a cosmopolitan entrepot was complemented by its growing importance as a node for trans-regional religious, ideological, and cultural flows between the archipelago and other parts of the world. Networks and circuits positing different visions of modernity, geographical and cultural/religious, from western European, to Middle Eastern and Islamic, and to Chinese, converged in Singapore, which became a regional centre in the production and reproduction of knowledge (Trocki 2006, 66-69; Roff 1967; Godley 1981; Kenley 2001).

In the last decades of the nineteenth century, the members of the extended YTM family, led by their leaders such as Raja Ali Kelana, the son and designated successor of the YTM Muhammad Yusuf, and Raja

Hitam, the son of Raja Ali Haji, participated in these networks and circuits, especially the reformist sphere emerging in the Middle East and in Singapore. The YTM family sought to base their authority over the communities in the outlying islands by emphasising their Islamic credentials and knowledge, especially their role in Islamic justice and education (Raja Ali Kelana 1986).

In the late 19th century, the *Persekutuan Rushdiyyah* (Rushdiyah club) was established in Pulau Penyengat as the base of the YTM family and as 'a forum for debate on contemporary Islamic issues and an avenue for disseminating religious treatises.' (Barnard 1994, 27) Applicants needed to provide examples of their written work to be considered for membership (Andaya 2003, 96; Barnard 1994, 26). Most of the Bugis princes in Penyengat were members, although membership was not restricted to this circle, and included 'Lingga Malays' and Sayids, some of whom, like Sayid Syeikh al-Hadi, were based in Singapore.

The leaders of the Rushdiyah Club also sought to encourage writing and publication among its members. Its members published exegeses on Islamic prayers and translations of works from Arabic (Andaya 1982: 127). Its formation seemed to have been related to the establishment of the *Matha'at al_Riauwiyah* printing press, a realisation of a long-held dream by leading members of the YTM family (Van der Putten 1995: 15-16). In addition, Sayid Sheikh al-Hady and Sheikh Muhammad Tahir Jalauddin, two of the founding editors of *al-Imam*, the first Islamic modernist newspaper in Singapore (founded in 1906), were closely related to the YTM family elite and the Rushdiyah Club. Together with other members of the Riau elite, Raja Ali Kelana and Raja Hitam contributed regularly to the *Al-Imam* after its founding in 1906.

Sayid Sheikh al-Hady, whose father was an Arab religious teacher who stayed in Penyengat for extended periods of time, and who was an adopted son of Raja Ali Kelana, exemplified these connections of the YTM family. He grew up in Penyengat and became the manager for Raja Ali Kelana's real estate and business interests in Singapore and Batam (Milner 1995: 145-7; Gordon 1999: 4-5). He assisted in the formation of the Rushdiyah Club, and 'took an active interest in its activities.' He not only accompanied the sons of the Sultan and Raja Muda on the pilgrimage to Mekka and to Egypt and the Levant, but was also the manager of the hostel for religious travellers in Riau (Roff 1967: 62). Sheikh Muhammad Tahir studied at al-Azhar in Cairo, Egypt, moving between the Riau-Lingga archipelago and the peninsula, while starting an Islamic school in Singapore with funds provided by Raja Ali Kelana (Andaya 1977: 140).

The YTM family was also economically drawn to Singapore. With revenue collection in Riau and Lingga increasingly in the hands of the Dutch administration, members of the YTM began to turn to Singapore

as a market for their various private business projects and investments, and indirectly, for the support of their religious activities. The combined economic and religious orientation of the YTM family towards Singapore was epitomised in the figure of Raja Ali Kelana, the heir apparent to the YTM Raja Muhammad Yusuf, and a leading figure in Pulau Penyengat Islamic scholarly and literary circles in the late nineteenth century. He not only owned properties in Singapore, but also had his own steamship that ran between Singapore, Riau and the Natunas. Singapore was also the market for bricks from his Batam factory and coconuts from his plantations in the Natunas (Gordon 1999: 5). He owned 15 houses in Singapore, and had his own residence there. Several Penyengat princes also owned 'modest residences' in Singapore, 'which they visited frequently'. Many people also 'traded extensively with Singapore merchants' (Andaya 1977: 127-8). Sayid Sheikh al-Hadi was the manager of these interests in Singapore and Batam.

The cosmopolitan port city of Singapore was to become an important gateway for the YTM family in their attempts to avoid marginalization by the Dutch colonial state in their realm, as the leaders were confronted by two crises. In 1899, the Dutch colonial government decided not to elect a new YTM and to persuade the Sultan to sign a treaty abolishing the office.[14] In 1913, when the Sultan refused to sign a treaty in which he would have conceded all power to the Dutch colonial government, he was deposed and the Sultanate abolished by the colonial government. These moves provoked the protests of the YTM family, who tried to secure foreign assistance to persuade the Dutch government to drop the decision. Efforts to reach the Ottoman court and the Japanese emperor by Raja Ali Kelana and Raja Hitam used Singapore as the place of embarkation and as the node for connecting to these centres' networks.

Raja Ali Kelana's journey to the court of the Ottoman in 1904 was not new. Kingdoms in the archipelago had turned to the Ottomans or to regional Islamic rulers in their wars against European expansion, from the Portuguese to the East India Companies of the Dutch and English. In 1858, Sultan Taha of Jambi had sent a mission requesting to be recognised as a subject or vassal of the Ottoman ruler to avoid Dutch occupation. Ottoman intervention was also believed to be imminent during the long-drawn out war in Aceh. It also coincided with the Caliphate movement promoted by the Sultan of Turkey, Sultan Abdul Hamid II, since the 1880s. Raja Ali Kelana's mission also coincided with the transfer of Kiamil Bey, the Ottoman consul in Batavia, to Singapore. The latter was known to have been an active promoter of the Caliphate (Andaya 1977). Raja Ali Kelana tried to make his way to Constantinople by meeting Kiamil, the Ottoman consul in Singapore, who had been one of the prominent promoters of the concept of the Caliph while he was

the consul in Batavia. Raja Ali Kelana seemed to have gone no further than Egypt where he tried to request an audience with the Khedive of Egypt (Andaya 1977).

Overtures to the Japanese emperor were also made at this same time (in March 1905), using the YTM's connections in Singapore, and the growing Japanese presence in the western archipelago at the turn of the twentieth century. Singapore was an important base for Japanese entrepreneurs and enterprises in their southward advance into Southeast Asia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Studies have shown the extent to which the Japanese entrepreneurs and companies had tried to penetrate the border regions of the Dutch East Indies during the turn of the twentieth century, especially in the photography business, the peddling of medicine as well as in the mining and plantation sectors, especially in rubber (Andaya 1977).

Raja Hitam, a YTM family member, had gone to Singapore on the excuse that he was setting up a pharmacy in cooperation with a Japanese firm, although Dutch intelligence reports suggested that he had actually gone there to negotiate with the Japanese to hand over the kingdom of Riau and Lingga to them (Andaya 1977: 140). The growing economic presence of the Japanese in Riau between 1908 and 1911, especially during the rubber boom of 1909, and an extension of the rapidly expanding Japanese-owned estates in Singapore, had been a cause of Dutch concern. It was this Japanese presence that the YTM family turned to for assistance in reversing Dutch policy. Raja Ali Kelana and the Sultan of Riau also negotiated secretly with individual Japanese parties for the sale and rental of certain islands, as well as various mining or copra growing concessions (Andaya 1977: 145). Japanese officers had visited Sultan Abdul Rahman in Riau in October 1910, when a Japanese naval training expedition landed in Riau.

When the Dutch authorities eventually decided to depose the Sultan in 1910, the YTM family once again turned to Japan. The Sultan chose Singapore as his place of exile, followed by the flight of large numbers of people from Riau in expectation of an impending war between the Japanese and Dutch. The Sultan met the Japanese consul in Singapore and turned copies of all the treaties between the Dutch government and himself over to the consul. He also met with Japanese representatives there and sent a letter to the commander of the Japanese squadron in Singapore, whom he had previously entertained in Riau.

The members of the YTM family turned not only to the Islamic modernist sphere and its international connections, but also to Pan-Asian networks based in Japan. They aired their grievances in the major newspapers in Singapore, including the *al-Imam* and the *Straits Times*, the two major Malay and English newspapers in Singapore at that time. Some of these articles were reprinted in newspapers and journals in Ja-

pan, for example, the *Dai To*, the main organ of a Pan-Asian society in Japan that had recently been established in 1910, and the Tokyo Islamic Brotherhood, also established in April of the same year (Andaya 1977: 141).

As Barbara Andaya (1977) has argued, the decision to turn to Japan was not only a reflection of this economic presence, but also the broader debates in the Islamic newspapers in Egypt and in the archipelago, especially in the Straits Settlements and Singapore. The success of Japan in the Russo-Japanese War had not only made it a source of hope for Middle Eastern and Asian communities battling European colonial encroachment but also led to fervent discussions about Japan as a model for Islamic modernist circles, in which technological modernisation could proceed alongside the maintenance of civilizational identity. There were even rumours that the Japanese emperor had converted to Islam, as well as of Japanese warships being sent to the Netherlands East Indies as a prelude to an invasion.

Raja Hitam began raising funds in 1912 for a mission to Tokyo to present the case of the family before the Japanese emperor, with a letter from Sultan Abdul Rahman and his advisors requesting that Riau come under Japanese rule with the Sultan restored to his former position. The way he went about organising and raising funds for the mission reflected the broader regional networks in which the family was embedded and the importance of Singapore in linking these circuits together. In September 1912, he was reportedly collecting money from Riau residents visiting Singapore, and *haj* pilgrims from Riau calling at Singapore. He also established a Malay trading cooperative in Singapore, which sold copra directly from the Pulau Tujuh area rather than through the Chinese middlemen, (Andaya 1977: 151). The Menteri Besar of Johor, in fact, was an active party in discussions held in Singapore and Johor. Singapore formed an important link in the ties between the Temenggong and YTM families, and the former, because of ties established during the late Sultan Abu Bakar's visit to Japan, provided potential access to official Japanese channels.

For his journey, Raja Hitam made use of his Japanese connections in Singapore, and 'Malay' connections in Tokyo. His journey was arranged by a Japanese doctor based in Singapore but acquainted with the YTM family, from whom he had received several land concessions in Riau. His contact person in Tokyo was a 'Penyengat native' working as a Malay language teacher at the Tokyo School for Foreign Languages, who was both a friend of Raja Ali Kelana and a son-in-law of the Menteri Besar of Johor. He had even received visits from the deposed Sultan of Riau-Lingga in Singapore before travelling to Tokyo. However, the trip resulted in nothing except wild rumours of Japanese military intervention. The failure of the first trip did not deter him from making a sec-

ond. The project was to die along with Raja Hitam, in 1913, when he passed away in Tokyo, a victim of the cold of winter, without achieving his objective (Andaya 1977: 153-4).

The strategies of the YTM family in the course of the nineteenth century and especially in the last decade of the Riau-Lingga Sultanate's existence reflected Singapore's importance as a global cosmopolitan port-city at the beginning of the twentieth century, as a corollary to its growth as an international entrepot. It became an important hub for the Islamic intellectual and political networks linking the archipelago with centres of knowledge and cultural production in the Middle East, as well as for the agents and visions of Pan-Asianism concomitant with Japan's southward economic expansion.[15]

The convergence of and interaction between these two forces provided the background for the strategies adopted by the YTM family against further Dutch encroachment at the turn of the twentieth century. Nevertheless, the failure of the YTM family's overture reflected the crystallisation of the imperial world-system and its borders. Thus, despite the cross-border Pan-Islamic and Pan-Asian visions espoused by the Ottoman court and certain groups in Japan, these states were reluctant to push the causes of the different elites within the Dutch East Indies threatened by Dutch colonial expansion. The efforts of the YTM family were ultimately futile, and they were to remain in exile.

The Temenggong Family: Singapore and Changing Imperial Visions

The case of the Temenggong family in Singapore and Johor synthesises the themes highlighted earlier in the development of Singapore as an entrepot, a centre for British imperialism, and as a cosmopolitan centre of cultural transmission and production in the region. The changes in British imperial policy and the imperial environment to shape the strategies of the Temenggong family in the last decades of the nineteenth and the early decades of the twentieth century, and their ties with Singapore. These strategies reflected the changing relations between the family and the British administration in Singapore. The family was to succeed where the two previous case studies failed, ultimately, by pushing for global recognition.

Despite their importance as signatories to the initial agreement with the British over Singapore and his role in brokering the participation of Tengku Hussein in the arrangements, which lent it legitimacy within the terms regnant in the Malay world, the Temenggong was gradually marginalised from the administration of the port. Alarmed by the attempts of his followers to exact taxes from the populace in the new port

town, as well as other disagreements over the role of the Temenggong in the new port, the British administration forced the family to relocate outside the new commercial town to Teluk Belanga (Trocki 1979: 49-55). The 1824 Treaty also deprived the Temenggong of his fiefs south of Singapore, especially the Karimun, Galang, and other islands where there were important *orang laut* communities. Although the Temenggong was said to have continued to act as if they owned these islands (Raja Ali Haji 1982: 244) after the treaty, the family's fortunes underwent a decline in the 1820s after the death of Temenggong Abdul Rahman in 1826.

The growth of Singapore as an international entrepot and the British imperial policy of non-intervention in the archipelago, as well as the growing importance of the port as a base for Christian missionary work in the archipelago, played important roles in reviving the fortunes of the Temenggong family. A major factor in the success of Temenggong Daeng Ibrahim, Temenggong Abdu Rahman's successor, was his rapprochement with the British administration in the Straits Settlements in the mid-1830s, and his co-operation with the governor, George Samuel Bonham, in the suppression of piracy in the region. The Temenggong exploited the limited, primarily commercial, imperial aims of the Singapore and Straits Settlements administrations, in their non-intervention, by acting as their intermediaries with other local rulers in the region, not only in anti-piracy campaigns but also in the resolution of various crises between and within peninsular polities. This role as intermediary allowed Daeng Ibrahim to exploit political crises in the peninsula to his advantage, as could be seen in Negeri Sembilan and Pahang in the 1850s, and to enjoy high regard in the eyes of the British administration in Singapore, which translated into commercial and political advantages in Singapore and its environs.

Singapore was thus crucial to the success of Daeng Ibrahim's attempts to create a new polity in peninsula Johor from the 1840s onwards. His standing with the British government in Singapore restored his reputation in the region, and he drew the *orang laut* from the neighbouring islands that had been affected by the British campaign against piracy, such as the *suku Galang*, to him. He resettled them along the southern coasts of the Johor peninsula to lay claim to the territory and to aid in the collection of *gutta percha* (Trocki 1979: 76-78). He was also able to secure ties to key European business houses, which were to provide crucial advice and expertise in managing his business and political interests in Singapore, Johor, and subsequently London. Paterson & Simon Co. and the lawyer Napier were to play important roles in these respects (Thio 1969; Trocki 1979: 72-76). They were central to his ability to corner the *gutta-percha* trade, in a commodity that saw a phenomenal growth in demand in Europe between the 1830s and 1850s. At the same

time, he was able to attract Chinese capital and labour, notably from the Chinese *gambier*-and-pepper economy in Singapore, for the development of peninsular Johor through the extension of this cultivation to the region. He also achieved control over the region through the issue of letters of authority under the *kang-chu* system. In this way, he was able to lay claim to Johor, despite the challenges from his rival, Tengku Ali, the son of Sultan Hussein in Singapore (Thio 1969; Trocki 1979, 1990).

His continued ability to continue to tap the British commercial networks and Straits Settlements administration was due to his association with the new Malay missionary schools set up by the Reverend Keasberry, an important missionary educator and publisher in the early and mid-nineteenth century. The sending of his son, the later Temenggong and Sultan Abu Bakar, and several children of his entourage, to Keasberry was to prove crucial in the development of the family's fortunes (Trocki 1979: 109, 320-322). Being conversant in English and in European ways, Temenggong Abu Bakar was to gain the cultural capital for his later successful cultivating of friendships and ties with European merchant and government circles in Singapore, and in establishing ties with European and Japanese royalty.

Nonetheless, by the 1850s and 1860s, the favoured position of the family in Singapore was coming under pressure from both within the European mercantile community (from merchants such as W.H. Read, who had earlier also criticized the Temenggong for his attempts to monopolize the *gutta percha* trade) and from within the British Straits Settlements government in Singapore. In 1855, the governor was to intervene in the dispute between Daeng Ibrahim and Tengku Ali, the son of Sultan Hussein, who also laid claim to Johor. A deal was brokered in 1855, in which Daeng Ibrahim was to acknowledge Tengku Ali as the Sultan and his claims over Muar, while the new Sultan was to recognise the Temenggong's claims over the rest of Johor, with the latter to pay him a lump sum and a monthly stipend (Winstedt 1979: 112).

Although the British administration in Singapore had acquiesced in Temenggong Daeng Ibrahim's assistance to his relatives and allies in Pahang, and later, in his open participation in the Pahang Civil War on their side during the early 1860s, they were increasingly uncomfortable with his ambitions on the peninsula and the methods he used. A major impasse also emerged over the Temenggong's attempts to channel the river trade in Johor through his new capital of Tanjung Putri in 1862. European and Chinese merchants lodged petitions with the British government in Singapore to protest his attempt to control Johor trade. Although petitions were made in his favour by a group of Chinese *kang-chu* and merchants, and he had his allies within the European merchant communities, his reputation in the eyes of the British administration in

Singapore nonetheless suffered. His situation was to worsen with re-
verses in Pahang, Negeri Sembilan, and Muar, during the mid-1860s
(Trocki 1979: 118-149).

Concomitant with these reverses was the news of the impending
transfer of the Straits Settlements from the British administration in
Calcutta to the direct control of the Colonial Office in London. His visit
to London was largely to establish direct ties with the monarch and gov-
ernment in London and circumvent both a government in the Straits
Settlements whose support for him seemed increasingly uncertain, as
well as a new colonial hierarchy centred on Singapore reporting directly
to London. He also wanted to be recognised as a ruler in his own right.
Such recognition was, however, not forthcoming from within the old
kingdom of Johor. Rupert Emerson's explanation of this visit was most
apt. The Temenggong and his family recognized that 'Singapore was
not the centre of the Empire', and had 'made themselves at home in
London and discreetly thrown their influence there into the balance
against the local officialdom of Malaya' (Emerson 1964: 198; Trocki
1979: 149). Ironically it was their connections with Singapore that pro-
vided them with the connections (and information), cultural capital and
wherewithal to adopt this strategy. Furthermore, Temenggong Abu Ba-
kar's education and experience 'as a young man half in the traditional
Malay world and half in the world of a cosmopolitan British port' laid
the foundation for the success of this strategy (Trocki 1979: 149-150;
Winstedt 1979: 109).

In London, Temenggong Abu Bakar had met the Queen and the royal
family, making a very favourable impression on Queen Victoria and the
Prince of Wales, later Edward VII. He continued to maintain a corre-
spondence with Queen Victoria, and was known to have, upon occa-
sion, appealed to her and the government in London on political mat-
ters, effectively bypassing the Governor in Singapore (Trocki 1979: 149).
In 1875, he even travelled to Calcutta to meet the Prince of Wales.

However, transcending these parameters did not mean forsaking
them. In fact, achieving recognition among the circles of royalty in Eur-
ope, China, Japan, and in the Netherlands East Indies were important
strategies for articulating his status as royalty and changing the percep-
tions of his status and place in the Malay world and in the British im-
perial sphere in Southeast Asia. It was on this journey that he started
using the title 'Maharaja' as his primary title (Trocki 1979: 154).[16] The
importance of a royal title and recognition as a sovereign ruler as a mo-
tive behind his visit to London was evident in his attempts to secure the
right to use the title upon his return.

Soon after his return, Temenggong Abu Bakar had sent his cousin
and minister as the leaders of a delegation to the YTM and Raja Ali
Haji in Riau to inquire 'the Temenggongs could now assume "sover-

eign power"'. As Winstedt (1979: 109) noted, this was but 'a euphe-
mism for a "royal title" in Riau'. After a survey of the genealogies at
Raja Ali Haji's disposal, and discussions over the first Bendahara Sul-
tan, the son of Tun Habib, as well as interviews over the rights of Sultan
Hussein and his son, Sultan Ali, their request was agreed to by the
YTM and Raja Ali Haji. Raja Ali Haji arrived in Singapore for the speci-
fic purpose on 7th May 1868 to 'arrange things (Winstedt 1979: 108-
9).[17]

It seemed that it was only after the confirmation of the new title by
Raja Ali Haji acting on behalf of the YTM and Sultan, that he received
confirmation in his title by the British. It was on 30 June 1868 that he
also wrote to thank the Governor of the Straits Settlements, Sir Harry
Ord, for the British government's acceding to his request to be referred
to as 'Maharaja' (Winsted 1979: 109).

Maharaja Abu Bakar's strategies after the 1860s reflected the chan-
ging British imperial vision in the peninsula, and the changing role of
Singapore in nineteenth-century Southeast Asia. From an entrepot in a
commercial network linking India and China, Singapore became an im-
portant base for British imperial expansion on the peninsula. Although
the Maharaja, like Daeng Ibrahim before, came to play an important
mediating role between the British government in the Straits Settle-
ments and the Malay rulers on the peninsula, the autonomous position
of Johor became increasingly an anomaly in the eyes of the Straits
Settlements government in Singapore, with the gradual incorporation
of the peninsula under indirect British rule.

The officials of the British imperial administration in Singapore had
come to see the old policy of using a Malay ruler as intermediary and
advisor in their dealings with the polities and rulers on the peninsula
as an anomaly in the new imperial formation. The emergence of offi-
cials who were antithetical to him and who sought a new, more direct
approach to British intervention in the peninsula, such as Sir Frederick
Weld (as governor) and the Earl of Kimberley (who was the Colonial Se-
cretary in 1880), dashed any hopes he had of securing support from
Singapore for his recognition as Sultan. In the early 1880s, there was
increasing pressure from the Governor Frederick Weld to end the infor-
mal advice policy that had previously been pursued in Johor, and to ap-
point a Resident there like in the other peninsula states (Thio 1967:
101-106; Sadka 1968; Trocki 1979).

The governor of the Straits Settlements in Singapore also tried to end
the role that the Maharaja had obtained in the districts of Negeri Sembi-
lan (Thio 1967: 100). The governor was said to see the Maharaja as a
'hindrance' to his policy of expansion in the peninsula. The Maharaja
began to turn away from the governor in Singapore to his private advi-
sors, namely Rodyk and Davidson, his lawyers, which further annoyed

Weld (Thio 1967: 101). There were also issues with the Johor's ruler's (and private advisors') concessions of land to 'foreign' companies without the approval of the Governor or the Colonial Office. Weld also raised the spectre of French financiers undertaking the development of this concession. Weld's proposals won over some in the Colonial Office, but the Permanent Under-Secretary stood by Abu Bakar. Nevertheless, the Maharaja had become alarmed about rumours in Singapore of Weld's plan, and even invited the acting governor, Sir Cecil Smith, to tour Johor to witness its development and administration.

The assistance provided by the Maharaja in the capture of the fugitives from the Perak War had earned him a recommendation from the British government in London that he be made a Sultan and possibly even ruler of Perak. This proposal was, however, met with vehement opposition by Sir William Jervois, who questioned the Temenggong's royal status. He argued that the post of Temenggong was 'not hereditary but elective, rarely held by a chief of royal blood, and not one conferring independent sovereignty'. Furthermore, he went on to argue that even the title of Maharaja was a usage of the British government, and 'the Malays ... did not regard him as a raja'. Jervois, the governor, argued that it was British support and his wealth from trade that had allowed Daeng Ibrahim to 'buy sovereignty' from Sultan Ali in 1855. Several officials in Singapore also believed that Abu Bakar did not have the right to use the title, and that this would not only arouse the opposition of the other Malay rulers, but also their disdain, and lower the standing of the British in their eyes (Winsted 1979: 111).

Thus, when he made his 1885 trip to England, his aim was to secure recognition as a ruler or Sultan, as well as avert British intervention in his state. To do so, he utilised the ties he had made in his previous visits to London, and negotiated directly with the Colonial office. As a result of a treaty he signed with the Secretary of State acting on behalf of the Queen in 1885, he relinquished control over his foreign policy to the Colonial Office, and secured his autonomy in the governing of Johor, although the treaty declared that he 'would not intervene in the politics or administration of any native state without the permission of the British government', and undertook not to grant concessions to 'other than British subjects, British Companies, or 'persons of Chinese, Malay, or other Oriental Race' without British permission.

His request to use the title of Sultan of Johor was also acceded to, although it was deemed necessary to define it in a way that would prevent any confusion with the older title, which implied rights to the Riau-Lingga archipelago, Pahang and Negeri Sembilan. The title of 'Sultan of the State and Territory of Johor' was decided upon (Thio 1967: 106). The Maharaja had secured his standing as a sovereign ruler by having the treaty recognised as one signed between two sovereign rulers

and governments, rather than between the colonial government in Singapore and himself.[18]

The Maharaja's travels to London, Europe, Java, and Japan in the 1870s and 1880s were a response to his changing relations with the British government in Singapore and the peninsula after the intervention in the west coast states and in Pahang. It was aimed at expanding the parameters for establishing his royal status and rank. Instead of just London, he sought to stake Johor's place within the global framework of sovereign states and royalty, and secure recognition that was not forthcoming from the British government in the Straits Settlements or the other Malay rulers in the region by transcending these parameters.

The Maharaja was to increase the frequency of his travels after the 1860s. The period between the 1860s and 1890s were to see the Maharaja broaden his circuits of travel to other parts of Europe and to East Asia. In the 1870s and 1880s, the Maharaja visited the Kaiser in Germany, the King of Italy, Emperor Francis Joseph of Austria, and Sultan Abdul Hamid of Turkey (Winstedt 1979: 119; Candilio and Bressan 2000: 43-53). He visited England again in 1878, where he expressed his intention to visit Italy, Paris and Vienna. Titles held by Sultan Abu Bakar in 1893 at the time of his death include the Royal Prussian Order of the Crown (First Class), Grand Cross of the Order of Kalakaua (Hawaii), Commander of the Cross of Italy, Commander of the Order of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha, Gold Medal received from HRH the Prince of Wales, Imperial Chinese Double Dragon Order (First Class), First Class Order of Boranji Nishana Murazzak of Othmani, First Class Order of the Iron Crown of Austria, Sovereign of the Most Esteemed Darja Krabat (Family Order) and the Most Honourable Darjah Mahakota Johore (Order of the Crown of Johore).

In 1881, he travelled throughout Java. In the same decade, he also entertained various British dignitaries in Singapore and Johor, including Prince Albert Victor, Prince George of Wales, the Duke of Sutherland, and the Prince of Saxon-Weimar (Winstedt 1979: 118). In 1883, he had visited Japan, then in the midst of modernisation based on Western models, and sought an audience with the Japanese emperor. Maharaja Abu Bakar's own reputation as a westernising and modernising monarch was believed to have been crucial to his being granted an audience with the Japanese emperor (although he was not yet a full Sultan). In 1885, he had called on the King of Italy and the Pope en route to visiting England.

Despite his attempts to resist subordination to Singapore, the port city remained crucial to the survival of Sultan Abu Bakar and his new state. Economically, it was tied to the port and its commercial and banking circles. Singapore also served as a model for his administration in Johor (Thio 1967: 114-115; Trocki 1979; Nesamalar 2003). Sultan Abu

Bakar's success in emulating Singapore in terms of lifestyle and administrative structure, for Johor, and in maintaining good relations with the colonial government in Singapore and with the Colonial Office in London was due to his ability to move within European and Chinese circles, especially in British commercial and financial circles, both in Singapore and in London and Europe. Paterson & Simons Co. remained his agents and managers, while he continued to take legal advice from the firm of Rodyk, Davidson & Co., both of which were based in Singapore.

His recognition as Sultan by the Colonial Office and the Queen did not stop Sir Frederick Weld and other officials in Singapore from pressing for a more direct British role in the administration of Johor. Nevertheless, Sultan Abu Bakar behaved increasingly like an independent sovereign in the 1880s and 1890s vis-à-vis the government in Singapore, but he was careful to adhere to the opinions of the Colonial Office (and the Secretary of State). After his recognition as Sultan, he had also set up an advisory board made up of former governors and officials from the Straits Settlements government in Singapore and the Colonial Office. This board 'usurped the role played by the Governor vis-à-vis the other states' (Thio 1967: 108).

All these measures were a means to avoid Johor's incorporation into the broader system of indirect British rule and bypassing the centre of that system, Singapore. Nevertheless, while Singapore was becoming an adversary in the Sultan's attempts to maintain the autonomy of his kingdom, it remained an important dimension of Johor's economy. He kept up his visits to Europe and London, maintaining a close relationship with the Queen (Winstedt 1979: 119). It perhaps came as no surprise then, that he passed away while visiting London in 1895, a trip the Sultan had taken against his doctors' advice. The Federated Malay States were only formed in 1895, the same year that Sultan Abu Bakar's passed away. Nevertheless, the Colonial Office was not going to force the appointment of an Agent as provided for in the 1885 treaty until 1909. This was a testament to the institutions and diplomacy of the old Sultan.

While Johor managed to avoid being included in the Federated Malay States in 1895, repeated efforts were made to incorporate Johor into the F.M.S. in the following decades. Scholars have argued how Sultan Ibrahim, his successor, lacked the adroitness and diplomacy of his father, and overplayed his cards through his brusqueness in dealing with the High Commissioner, the Governor and the Colonial Office on various matters of dispute, most importantly that of the extension of the Federated Malay States Railway into Johor (Thio 1967: 229-235). Alienating the board of advisors and members of his own ruling council (Thio 1967: 225-226), as well as the Colonial Office, i.e., the alternative chan-

nels that his father had tried so hard to cultivate, the young Sultan came under increasing pressure to accept a British agent, which he acceded to in 1909. In 1913, the powers of the agent were finally upgraded to that of a Resident, marking Johor's incorporation within the British system of indirect rule.[19]

With Johor's incorporation into the British Empire on the peninsula, Singapore's importance for the ruling elites of Johor emerged once again. Resigned to British intervention, the Sultan insisted on avoiding any communication with the High Commissioner of the F.M.S. despite his efforts to bring Johor under his purview (as part of the peninsula), and corresponded directly with the Straits Settlements government in Singapore. In this context, Singapore became an important intermediary between the young Sultan in Johor and the Federated Malay States (F.M.S.) government in Kuala Lumpur. It became an important means through which the Sultanate of Johor sought to maintain its distinction from the other states and rulers, and autonomy from the F.M.S.

Conclusion

The historiography of nineteenth-century Singapore has largely focused on its commercial importance and its cosmopolitan social make-up (with the organization and activities of the European, Chinese, and Parsi-Armenian trading communities), as well as the infrastructural development, locally and internationally, which were central to its growth into a regional and international entrepot (Turnbull 1977; Chew & Lee 1991). With the exception of several notable studies which have sought to locate Singapore's history within the broader context of Anglo-Dutch rivalry in the first thirty years of the nineteenth century, the growth of a Malay-Muslim intellectual and public sphere in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, or the regional and transregional networks of Chinese labour and capital through tax-farming and the *kongsis*,[20] most histories of Singapore have focused specifically on the parameters of the island nation-state today, or at best, the British empire encompassing the Straits Settlements and the peninsula. As the abovementioned studies have demonstrated, more recent histories of Singapore have attempted (Preston 2007; Trocki 2006) to understand its history in terms of a 'global system' and its political and economic structures. Yet, few studies have attempted to look at Singapore's nineteenth-century history in terms of the changes in regime in the Malay world region, and from the perspective of the elites of the former kingdom of Johor after the 1824 Treaty.

This essay has attempted to examine the nineteenth-century history of Singapore from the perspective of its place in the processes of re-

gime change within the Malay world region, by examining the travails of three elite families from the kingdom of Johor in the face of European imperial expansion. It is an attempt to locate Singapore's history within the broader regional framework of the colonial transition in the Malay world through the synthesis of the existing scholarship [namely the works of Trocki (1979, 1990, 2005), Andaya (1977), Matheson (1970), and van der Putten (1995, 2001)] to show how the strategies adopted by the families of the Sultan in Lingga, the YTM in Riau, and the Temenggong-Maharaja-Sultan in peninsular Johor highlighted the different dimensions of Singapore's growth as a colonial port-city straddling the Anglo-Dutch border, as well as its Janus-faced roles in these processes of colonial expansion.

In trying to resist the processes of European encroachment and incorporation within their new regimes or challenges from other local elites, these families articulated alternative spatial realities challenging the new Anglo-Dutch regime in the Malay world through their travels, lifestyles, and ideologies, be it the older networks of the kingdom of Johor, the trans-regional Islamic ecumene, or the world networks of royalty.

Singapore played an important role in facilitating their ability to do so. Each of the case studies highlighted a particular dimension of Singapore's position as an entrepot and imperial outpost, reiterating the Janus-faced roles played by Singapore in the processes of 'regime-change' in the archipelago. While providing access to capital, income, information and labour, which actually undermined the new Anglo-Dutch parameters of politics and established hierarchies in the autonomous states, Singapore was also the point from which they policed the movement of people, arms and other commodities, to prevent any severe disruption of the status quo and the encroachment of any European or Asian power into its perceived sphere of influence, namely the peninsula. Hence, it undermined as well as consolidated the new European imperial parameters in the Malay world. It functioned both as a gateway-intermediary and as an imperial 'panopticon'.

Approaching the history of Singapore from the perspective of these families also provides continuity to the pre-1819 history of the kingdom of Johor and the Malay world. It highlights the convergences and overlaps in the histories of these families despite the division of the old Johor kingdom in the 1824 Anglo-Dutch treaty, and the dialectical tension between continuity and change in terms of the older parameters of politics in the context of the new realities imposed by the 1824 treaty and the subsequent implementations of the British and Dutch governments.

Ultimately, the failure of these elites in maintaining their autonomy paralleled Singapore's integration into a modern capitalist world system. Even as the growing sophistication (and inequality) in the relations of

interdependence between different parts of the world, and the enhanced potential for the movement of people, ideas, and commodities through improved infrastructural changes, provided the impetus and conditions for the emergence of alternative political and epistemological visions, the spaces for such autonomy gradually shrank as the British, Dutch, Siamese, and other European powers consolidated their hold any ambiguous areas between them.[21]

Notes

1 In a case study of Melaka, Anderson & Vorster (1986: 1-5) have argued that, contrary to standard arguments at that time that Melaka had no hinterland, a hinterland did exist for this entrepot and needed to be seen not only in terms of its immediate surroundings but to 'distant zones' as far as 200 miles from the port, 'where the products of forest, sea, and mine were extracted'. The survival and success of the port depended on personal alliances based on close economic, political and social relations, tying the port, often through a 'hierarchy of subordinate posts', to supplies of strategic commodities for the international trade networks calling at these ports.

2 Different papers in this volume deal with trade and state-formation in the Malay peninsula, Sumatra, west Java, the Spice Islands, Ayutthaya, Makassar and Magindanao before European expansion in these areas.

3 See Sandhu (1983), Furber (1976), Boomgaard, Kooiman & Schulte Nordholt (2008), Veen &Blusse (2005), Sutherland (1989), Knaap & Sutherland (2004), Locher-Scholten & Rietbergen (2004), among others.

4 Personal communication from Prof. Leonard Blussé, who rightly argued that the VOC (Dutch East India Company) trade was more monopsonistic than monopolistic.

5 Although the VOC administration in Melaka and other ports liberalized their policies on non-Company trade in its port, vis-à-vis private citizens or burghers in the port-town or British country traders calling at the port, they still maintained a vested interest in the trade in various commodities.

6 Thus, taxes on opium, spirits, gambling and other forms of consumption became the key source of revenue. The Chinese population became the main source of such revenue, and this was one of the reasons for the promotion of Chinese migration to the port alongside labour needs and trade. Buckley (1967) cites incidents of merchant protests against proposals to tax trade in the first half of the nineteenth century.

7 The relations to the peninsula have been studied in detail by Mills (1966), Khoo (1972), and Trocki (1979), among others. The same cannot be said of Singapore's ties to the Dutch side of the border. Only through remedying this balance can a clearer picture be obtained of the regional significance of Singapore, not only commercially but also politically.

8 See Wong (2003), Turnbull (1977: 1-127) and Chew & Lee (1991) for more details on the growth of Singapore as an entrepot, in terms of its trade, its infrastructure and port facilities, as well as the British administration and the different ethnic communities playing important roles in this growth.

9 Works on the YTM family in Riau have focused largely on their roles as producers of literature and histories, and their relationships with Dutch officials in this regard. The works of Jan van der Putten stand out in his attempt to politically and economically contextualize these relations and activities, as well as to engage with the theoretical literature on the colonial encounter and cultural studies. Thus far, the only work on Sultan Mah-

mud is Matheson's essay on the ruler based on an annotated translation of the final section of the Tuhfat al-Nafis.

10 Both were using the term in a rather different context. Its use here is meant to convey the function of surveillance.

11 The Engku Puteri was the sister of Raja Jafar and widow of Sultan Mahmud (d. 1812). She was a very influential figure. It was only through the Dutch officials of Melaka that they managed to seize the regalia.

12 The Temenggong travelled to Riau and Lingga, and the Bendahara of Pahang had presided over the circumcision and the installing of Sultan Mahmud himself in the 1840s.

13 Successive YTMs from Raja Ali (d. 1805) onwards were represented as exemplary Islamic rulers, in their embodiment of scholarship, practice, and patronage of Islam (Raja Ali Haji 1982). It was an attempt to create new standards for kingship. Sultan Mahmud was presented as the antithesis of the ideal Islamic ruler. Genealogy and rank were no longer sufficient in and of themselves. Islamic piety and patronage, knowledge of Islamic treatises and theology, as well as respect for elders and humility constituted a new set of ideals for the ruler, which was rather different from those encapsulated in the Hikayat Siak and the Sejarah Melayu.

14 After 1885, the Sultan and YTM were both of the same family. Sultan Abdul Rahman, in fact, was the son of the last YTM who served from 1858 and 1869. He was installed as ruler after the death of his granduncle, Sultan Sulaiman, as his mother was the daughter of Sultan Mahmud.

15 An expanding European presence in the port town and other parts of British Malaya and the Straits Settlements, and the influences of political and intellectual changes in China and India at that time contributed to the diversity and dynamism of this hub.

16 Buckley (1967: 449-451) and Kwa (2003: 49) show that Daeng Ibrahim, Temenggong Abdul Rahman's father, was already using the title Sri Maharajah in 1846, as evidenced by the Straits Settlements governor's address in recognition of his contribution to the suppression of piracy.

17 Sultan Sulaiman of Lingga, who happened to be staying in Tanjung Pinang at that time, also agreed to the request, although he qualified that they could not make the Bendahara a raja as yet, and the Temenggong should try to obtain the agreement of Sultan Ali. Despite his differences with the YTM at that time, he declared that he and the YTM 'would like Abu Bakar to "become a Raja"' (Trocki 1979: 151).

18 Although the treaty provided for the appointment of a British 'Agent', it was worded such that this agent was to have 'functions similar to those of a consular officer' (Nesamalar 2000: 32). He was effectively bypassing the government in Singapore, and negotiating directly with the Colonial Office in London and the Queen, deliberately avoiding incorporation into the emerging colonial hierarchy, which was at that time centred in Singapore. The inclusion of these clauses as well as those providing for succession 'lawfully succeeding according to Malay custom' were meant to prevent the incursion of foreign powers and prevent him from selling his throne (Thio 1967: 107).

19 This is despite the inclusion of Johor among the Unfederated Malay States, vis-à-vis the Federated Malay States constituted earlier in 1895 of states already brought under indirect British rule under the Resident System.

20 These were not strictly histories of Singapore per se but histories of Anglo-Dutch rivalry and piracy (Tarling 1958, 1962), opium farming (Trocki 1990), and Roff (1980).

21 A good example of these processes of defining borders can be found in Sweeney (1982) for Johor/Pahang in the peninsula, Thongchai (1993) for Siam-Britain-France on the northern peninsula and along the Siam-Cambodia border, and Eric Tagliacozzo (2005) for the border arc from the Straits of Melaka to the Sulu Sea.

4 Beyond the Rhetoric of Communalism: Violence and the Process of Reconciliation in 1950s Singapore

Syed Muhd Khairudin Aljunied

Introduction: The Singapore State's Teleology of History

The Singapore state's depiction of inter-ethnic relations in the post-World War Two period has been predicated upon a progressivist teleology that undergirds its political dominance since the separation from Malaysia in 1965. Rendered ineffective and portrayed as having lost their grip upon the forces of opposition, the preceding colonial regime is said to have failed in fostering common bonds and values between a plethora of racial groupings on the island. Communalist tendencies arising from colonial neglect thus characterized the postwar era and this had given rise to the outbreak of violent incidences such as the Maria Hertogh, Hock Lee and the 1964 racial riots. Although problematic and fraught with presentism, such logic of a radical break from the tumultuous past to that of a cohesive and ordered society has become a part of the collective memory of Singaporeans today. Indeed, so strong has been the influence of such master national narrative that it has impacted the contents and forms of historical texts written by professional historians and various genres of popular media (Loh 1998: 12; Lysa and Yap 1993: 36; Tan 2004: 31-35; Hill 2002).

This chapter offers an alternative view to the prevailing line of reasoning. I argue that inter-ethnic relations and interactions in post-WWII Singapore were more dynamic and vigorous than has been previously suggested in the mainstream historical literature. In point of fact, mutual cooperation between ethnic, religious and ideological groupings was, arguably, a distinct feature of the island's social geography. By examining the immediate aftermath of the Maria Hertogh riots as a critical moment in demonstrating how the colonial state, prominent individuals, newspapers and local organisations played crucial roles in reconciling severed ties and allaying a culture of fear and sus-

picion, this chapter seeks to destabilise the dominant narrative of Singapore's history and to build a case for a new trajectory.

The Maria Hertogh Controversy in Perspective

The sequence of events leading up to the Maria Hertogh riots has been well-documented elsewhere and this is no place to provide a comprehensive account of the factors and causes of the outbreak of mass violence. As an overview, the riots stemmed from a legal battle for the custody of a 13-year-old Dutch girl, Maria Hertogh, who had been raised as a Muslim by a Malay-Indonesian family. After having been separated for more than seven years, the girl's parents, who were of Dutch-Catholic origins, claimed custody of their child and requested her return to the Netherlands. Press sensationalism about the legal issues along with the marriage of Maria Hertogh to a Malay teacher, Mansor Adabi, in the midst of the legal proceedings had heightened Muslim and non-Muslim sensitivities in Singapore. The situation was made worse upon the British court's annulment of the marriage, which meant that Maria Hertogh was to be returned to the fold of her natural parents. From 11 to 13 December 1950, Singapore witnessed one of its most intense outbreaks of mass violence. Europeans and Eurasians became the targets of radical Muslims, hooligans and other opportunists. Coupled by the passivity of the Malay police, the rioters engaged in widespread destruction of public property, murder, looting and arson. Eighteen persons were killed, 173 were injured and hundreds were placed under detention.[1] To be sure, the ties between Muslims, Europeans, Eurasians and the British colonial administration in the colony had been severely impaired by the riots and the legal controversy. The prospects of reconciliation were even grimmer.

In what follows, I shall provide an analysis of the daunting task faced by the British and local communities in reconciling with the interests of multiple parties on the island. Three inter-connected approaches were employed by the colonial state to diffuse the tense atmosphere. First, the British propounded that they were not, by any means, insensitive towards Islam and the immediate concerns of Muslims in Singapore. Secondly, attempts were made to re-establish cordial relations with politicians and administrators in the Netherlands, yet, at the same time, they tried to alleviate the established perception among Muslims that the British were pro-Dutch. Thirdly, intensive measures were undertaken to regain the confidence of the European, Eurasian and other communities in Singapore who had been traumatized by the spectre of violence and the ineffectiveness of the police force. Indeed, a great number of people from various beliefs, ethnicities and classes in the colony were

plagued by grief and suffering resulting from the loss of human life as well as financial losses incurred due to damaged and stolen property.

In other words, the British were confronted with the difficult and precarious task of ensuring that no individual, group or institution implicated in the Maria Hertogh controversy was given preferential treatment over others. To balance and rule, more than to divide and rule, was the British approach to the politics of polishing up their tarnished image and agency in the aftermath of the riots. It is important to point out that, although the colonial state played a key role in the complex yet intensive process of reconciliation, it did not however possess a sole monopoly of initiative. Accordingly, I will expound on how non-state actors within the colonized society actively contributed to the efforts of mending inter-racial and religious relations that had been severely shaken by the riots and providing relief to those who had suffered throughout the ordeal.

Restoring Public Confidence

One of the earliest attempts by Singapore Colonial Secretary, Wilfred Blythe, to reconcile with the distressed public was to make it known that law and order had been reinstated only two days after the outbreak of violence. During a radio broadcast, Blythe announced that government offices would resume their daily operations and that 'this example will be followed by all in Singapore.' Put simply, life would return to normal. The Singapore public was also furnished with emergency procedures that had been established since the quelling of the riots. A coordinated communication network between the Public Relations Office, the Executive Council and the police force had been instituted to ensure a swift deployment of military and police officers in the face of all forms of widespread disturbances (*Straits Times*, 20 December 1950).[2] At about the same time, a diplomatic visit by two American Senators received extensive publicity. Theodore F. Green and Homer Ferguson were reported to have walked along North Bridge Road – a site where Europeans had been attacked – without police escorts. When interviewed by a reporter from the *Straits Times*, the Senators remarked that they 'were impressed by Singapore's prosperity (*Straits Times*, 16 December 1950).'

This sort of shallow propaganda met with a mixed reaction in newspaper editorials in both Singapore and England. As the unofficial voice of the UMNO party in Malaya, the *Majlis* newspaper expressed its scepticism towards the Colonial Secretary's optimistic forecast. The editorial remarked in a satirical way that, '*Belanda makan nangka, British dapat getah*' which implied that although the Dutch had been the instigators,

it was the British who were left to shoulder the long-term consequences of the riots. The editorial highlighted the fact that a large number of shops in the riot-stricken areas were still closed, and attendance at work had dropped substantially as many workers were apparently injured or arrested, or refused to leave their homes in fear of their lives. This fear was compounded by a growing animosity towards Muslims who were perceived as the main culprits behind the riots (*Majlis*, 15 December 1950).

The Manchester Guardian, a British daily newspaper, in turn emphasised the possibility of a major outbreak of violence between the Malays and Chinese in Singapore. Some claimed that the riots were rooted in the entrenched bitterness of Malays towards the political and economic dominance of the British and the Chinese in the colony. Race and class differences rather than religion were the driving forces behind the riots and many skirmishes to come. These politically charged comments were widely publicised in the pages of the *Singapore Standard* (14 December 1950). *Utusan Melayu* denounced what it deemed as the erroneous and shallow analyses of the *Manchester Guardian*. The locally published Malay daily maintained that most Malays in Singapore regarded the Chinese as their co-citizens and that there had never been a deliberate campaign to uproot the Chinese from Malaya (*Utusan Melayu*, 19 December 1950).

Reacting to the seemingly negative portrayals by the press on developments in Singapore, representatives from various states and organisations in mainland Malaya published their appeals for Muslims to remain calm. They expressed the hope that non-violence and the ideology of peace would be upheld by all of the parties. Under the chairmanship of the President of the United Malay Nationalists Organisation (UMNO), Dato Onn bin Jaafar, Muslim elites in Singapore in turn encouraged their co-religionists to work towards mending inter-religious ties that had been severely disrupted by the riots. Among those who signed a public statement that was published in all of the major newspapers in the colony were Maulana Abdul Aleem Siddiqui, Tuan Haji Ali bin Haji Salleh (the Chief *Kathi* of Singapore) and M.J. Namazie (*Utusan Melayu*, 14-15th December 1950). The Singapore Colonial Secretary also issued a public statement, which stressed the importance of the media in the reconciliation process. Newspaper editors were prompted to seriously 'reflect upon the incidents of the last few weeks, for there is a lesson to be learned here too – the lesson that if we are to maintain that harmony for which Singapore has, since its foundation, been famed, care must be taken in the presentation of news not to offend religious susceptibilities and exacerbate communal differences (*Singapore Free Press*, 20 December 1950).'

Blythe's tactic of what has been termed 'blame displacement'[3] for the outbreak of riots was not left unchallenged. *The Straits Budget* countered the Singapore Colonial Secretary's remarks by publishing several opinion pieces, which portrayed the British as the chief culprits behind the tensions. A European, for example, commented that although the British colonial administration in Singapore professed their profound respect for the religion of Islam, events that had unfolded in the months prior to the riots revealed that the government had failed to live up to its own rhetoric. The outbreak of mass violence was a product of British insensitivity and indifference to the demands of Muslims (*Straits Budget*, 21 December 1950). Reflecting on the debate that ensued, John Leslie Michael Gorrie (the private secretary to Singapore's governor) reasoned that the blame placed on the press was based on hindsight rather than foresight. No governmental agency had made attempts to play down what was alleged to be sensational press coverage of the Maria Hertogh legal case. Gorrie thought that the British government shouldered much of the blame for the riots. The newly established civil service was unacquainted with the socio-religious challenges and anxieties faced by the Muslim minority community in the immediate post-war years and this was further exacerbated by the outright mishandling of various issues that were deemed sacred to Muslims. The government, and not the press per se, was responsible for the attacks on Europeans during the riots (Recorded Interview with Gorrie 1991).

The Chinese community in Singapore also played an important role in promoting a dialogue, assuaging tensions and assisting the British in the maintenance of public order. The largest Chinese daily newspaper, the *Nanyang Siang Pao*, urged the British to 'think thrice' before making a legal decision in the upcoming appeal trial. The move to restore Maria Hertogh to her foster mother and husband would be of no great loss to Britain's diplomatic ally; the Dutch. On the other hand, the Malays were an important and integral part of the British Empire. The British should therefore ensure the repatriation of Maria Hertogh back to Singapore to avoid the violation of the religious rights of the Muslims, which could potentially lead to further bloodshed and violence. The Kuomintang newspaper, *Sin Chew Jit Poh*, called upon the British, the Dutch and the Muslims to allow Maria Hertogh to decide for herself whether she wished to reside in the Netherlands or Malaya. The paper stressed that Dutch diplomatic relations with other Muslim countries, such as Indonesia and Pakistan, would most certainly be jeopardized if custody of Maria Hertogh were to be awarded to her natural parents.[4] Another observer who identified himself as a 'Straits Chinese' expressed his regrets that the 'very good name of the Singapore Malays and Muslims, who are regarded as a most law-abiding community in the colony has been besmirched (*Straits Times*, 17 December 1950).'

Several well-known Chinese personalities exerted their influence over the community by discouraging youths in the villages from committing acts of violence. This was followed by an announcement made by the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce in regard to the formation of a Volunteer Special Constabulary Emergency Squad. No age limit was imposed, though all appointments were temporary. Selected candidates would undergo basic police training to assist the Singapore Police Force in the course of its on-going reforms (*Singapore Free Press*, 20 December 1950).

Admittedly, such a proactive move by Chinese elites in the colony was not entirely motivated by altruism. It was, in some measure, a latent strategy to regain the trust of the British, which had been blemished by the growing assumption that most Chinese supported the communists. The Chinese elites in Singapore were purportedly filled with hope and optimism regarding the quelling of the riots. Although they were sympathetic towards the Europeans and Eurasians who were injured and murdered by the rioters, the Chinese elites were glad that the British had begun to realize the flaws in their pro-Malay policy. The Chinese hoped that friendship and trust would swing back in their favour.[5] Beyond the public show of support, the general view among the Anglophone Chinese was that the riots 'served them (the British) bloody well right'.[6]

But hatred, hostility and distrust were too deep-seated to be swiftly remedied. Despite the appeals of community leaders, Muslims in Singapore were committed to the perception that the British would not cease to deny them their religious rights.[7] The most radical among them were prepared for further violent confrontations in reaction to any sign of Western prejudice towards Islam and Muslims. In the same way, Europeans and Eurasians expressed their lack of confidence in the colonial state's ability to ease the tense situation. On 17 December, an anonymous writer who signed off as 'A European' wrote a polemical commentary against the police for its failure to protect the people during the riots. 'It is indeed news to learn that the police are issued with firearms only to save their own lives. Surely their primary purpose is to protect the public whom they serve and to quell riots and other dangerous threats to public security? Is it not for this purpose that they are issued with weapons (*Straits Times*, 17 December 1950)?'

Such alarmist and negative reactions were not surprising, as the two communities were the main victims of the riots. The Europeans were particularly mortified by the fact that they were the primary targets of mass aggression. Women and children from the largely expatriate community were haunted by vivid recollections of assaults upon their families and friends. A former British colonial official in Singapore recounted that it 'was a nasty time for all of us'. Recalling his ambivalence

towards a Malay driver at the time of the riots, Lionel Griffith-Jones wrote: 'We could neither be sure whether his Muslim presence with me would make it safer for me, or my Christian presence with him makes things uncomfortable for him (Griffith-Jones 1984: 138).'

Unbeknownst to the general public, government officials had organized several meetings with Europeans and Eurasians to address their anxieties and to provide updates on the security measures that had been taken to protect them. In one of the meetings, a suggestion was made that Europeans and Eurasians residing in areas where fatal attacks had taken place should be provided with revolvers for self-defence. But the idea was shelved as it proved to be problematic at a practical level. Rudy Mosbergen, who played an active role in airing his views during the meetings, posited that it 'could well be that the idea was dropped because of all kinds of problems that would emerge from such an arrangement (Interview with Mosbergen 1994).' It was feared that the carrying of firearms would precipitate unintended conflicts and violence. Moreover, the Eurasians were mindful that Henry L. Velge, the Volunteer Special Constable who fired the first shots during the riots, which injured two Malays, was a well-respected member of the Eurasian community. Hence, one of the safe courses adopted by Europeans and Eurasians in the aftermath of the riots was to stay indoors. They were also advised by the police to refrain from visiting areas where their safety would likely be compromised. Although it was an exception to the rule, several Eurasian families did manage to migrate to Europe and Australia in order to escape Muslim aggression. A similar policy was adopted by some American expatriates in Singapore who, as a precautionary measure, had sent their wives and children back to the United States (Recorded Interview with Chopard 1985; *Antara*, 11 January 1951).

Meanwhile, members of the quasi-governmental Muslim Advisory Board stepped up their campaign to restore Maria Hertogh to her husband and to agitate for the release of detainees who had not participated in the riots. A dialogue between prominent Muslims and the Singapore Governor (Franklin Gimson) was held, at which three pertinent demands were put forward. First, the Muslim leaders sought an assurance from the British that the Dutch would be informed of the appointment of a Muslim who was tasked by the Muslim Advisory Board to ascertain 'the wishes of the said Nadra binte Ma'aroof (Maria Hertogh) as to whether she desires to remain in Holland or to be returned to Singapore'. The second demand pertained to Maria Hertogh's return to Singapore during the appeals court hearing. The Muslim deputation hoped that the British would ensure the full cooperation of the Dutch in that aspect. Finally, a request was made that those in police custody be treated in a humane manner to avoid punishment of the innocent. Sardon

Jubir highlighted the need for relief grants for the dependents of those who had been arrested during the riots.[8]

In response, Gimson stressed that the British Government viewed the Maria Hertogh case purely from a judicial angle and that all decisions would be left to the court's discretion. The Singapore Governor added that the British would maintain their fullest respect of Islam and would safeguard the religious liberties of Muslims. He went on to assure them that the first and second demands would be brought to the attention of the Home Government. As for the third demand, Gimson gave his word that the Social Welfare Department would commit its resources towards alleviating all forms of difficulties faced by the families of those injured and the many others who had been arrested. The Governor added that the screening of detainees would be hastened to weed out the innocent. The meeting went on to discuss various measures to promote the welfare of the Muslim community and the protection of Islamic customs in these emotionally intense times. Acting upon the advice of the Colonial Office, the Governor later acceded to the first demand and said that the government would assist to the fullest extent in obtaining the cooperation of the Dutch authorities in ensuring that Maria Hertogh would be present for the appeal. At a personal level, however, Gimson was apparently shaken by the meeting because it reflected the heightened activism and assertiveness of the Muslim elites. He was certain that the failure to respond effectively to Muslim demands would further inflame animosities locally and in other parts of the Muslim world.[9]

Correspondingly, the Singapore Colonial Secretary issued another press release, which stated that 45 armed vehicles, 15 armoured cars and 600 soldiers and policemen had been deployed throughout Singapore. It was reported that crowds were seen cheering as the troops passed through their neighbourhoods; a clear testimony that a majority of the citizens of Singapore respected the laws of the colony and were sanguine that the military would protect their lives and property. The Singapore Colonial Secretary also paid tribute to the Volunteer Special Constables for their commitment and vigilance in aiding the regular policemen (*Singapore Free Press*, 19 December 1950).

In London, colonial officials sought the cooperation of Dutch politicians in the Netherlands to mitigate excessive press coverage of Maria Hertogh's arrival at Schiphol airport. Muslims in Singapore were aware of developments in the Netherlands and would react violently to the jubilant celebrations, which had been planned by Catholic activists. Writing to the Colonial Office, Philip Nichols (British Ambassador at The Hague) reported that a strict warning had been issued to all Dutch newspapers to avoid sensationalism and misreporting. Dozens of Christian organisations and parties were also advised to practise moderation

in cheering for the Hertoghs upon their arrival at the Schiphol airport. Though the Dutch authorities were unsuccessful in preventing the cheers of large crowds at the airport, pre-emptive measures prevailed on numerous other occasions. At Bergen-op-Zoom, where the Hertoghs lived, no extensive celebrations were observed. The nation's newspapers covered the story in great detail, yet none highlighted the political and religious aspects rooted within the legal case 'except to say that the riots were [a sign] of the present tension between the East and the West. Comment in the responsible newspapers were on the lines that unhealthy interest was being shown in this little girl and that the sooner the whole story was forgotten the better it would be for all concerned. In short, I think the Government has not done badly, though for some reason or other something seems to have gone wrong at Schiphol itself.'[10]

Pacifying the Muslims

From 24 through 25 December, a Southeast Asia Muslim Missionary Conference organized by the All-Malaya Muslim Missionary Society (also known as *Jamiyah*) was held in Singapore. British intelligence was concerned with attempts by Muslim leaders to garner support for the Maria Hertogh case, while, Malcolm Macdonald believed the event provided an excellent opportunity to repair the damaged ties with influential Muslim leaders in Southeast Asia. Although Malcolm Macdonald was unable to deliver the inaugural address at the Conference, he ensured that a carefully crafted speech was sent to the organizers to be read on his behalf. *Jamiyah* was commended for taking the lead in strengthening the religious commitment of Muslims in Southeast Asia in the midst of an unending battle against secular ideologies, which promoted violence. Furthermore, Malcolm Macdonald called for close cooperation between representatives from different territories to bring about a climate of religious freedom and mutual tolerance (Ahmad and Wanjor 1950: 7).

The Commissioner-General's critical role in the promotion of religious dialogue and understanding did not end there. He called for a meeting on his own initiative with members of the Inter-Religious Organisation (I.R.O). Formed only a year prior to the riots, the I.R.O. was the brainchild of Maulana Abdul Aleem Siddiqui, whose main goal was to establish a religious front against the corrupting influence of communism in Singapore and Malaya. The I.R.O. pursued three inter-related objectives. First, the organisation hoped to foster friendship and goodwill between leaders and representatives of major world religions. Secondly, it aimed to promote a spirit of mutual tolerance, understand-

ing and appreciation among different faiths. Third, the I.R.O. hoped to foster close cooperation among its members for the common good of the community. Informal activities, regular discussions and annual conferences were organized to fortify a common set of values between its members and the general public.[11]

As the patron of the I.R.O., Malcolm Macdonald was instrumental in garnering widespread support for the organisation from its inception. A major setback occurred when he attempted to win over the Roman Catholics, who were instructed 'by orders from higher authority outside Malaya' to play no part in the activities of the organisation.[12] Even so, the Roman Catholics were kept up to date on the I.R.O.'s resolutions and activities. Three weeks after the outbreak of the riots, Malcolm Macdonald called for an informal tea with the executive members of the I.R.O. Distrust and disappointment was manifested by those present, however. The Christians, for that matter, were embittered by the lack of compassion shown by Muslim leaders towards Christian members of the I.R.O. who had been attacked by rioters. One of the worst casualties was a Presbyterian Minister, Robert Greer, who had been beaten nearly to death. Muslim members of the I.R.O explained that they were unable to reach out to the non-Muslim victims of the riots because they were preoccupied with the urgent task of dissuading their co-religionists from engaging in violent acts. As the tea proceeded, Macdonald mooted the idea of issuing a public statement on the maintenance of religious harmony in Singapore. Several members expressed their reservations, but a consensus was reached in that the declaration would be 'simple, sincere and in its way, [a] noble statement of the unity upon this issue of the leaders of all the religions represented in Singapore and Johore. As such, it will have a certain amount of influence on large numbers of local followers of all the faiths.'[13] The statement was subsequently publicized by the media, which described it as a notable effort by religious leaders in the colony to reach out to those who were directly or indirectly affected by the riots (*Utusan Melayu* 12 January 1950; *Straits Times* 12 January 1950). Soon after, members of the I.R.O. subsequently organised visits to hospitals and provided necessary aid to those who had been injured. It was indeed a crucial juncture in the history of the organisation, as it rose to greater prominence in the midst of the reconciliation process (Interview with Singh 1985). Although Catholics maintained a guarded distance from the organisation, the I.R.O. played a major role in bridging religious boundaries and dispelling misconceptions, both in Singapore and in Malaya, up to the advent of the Labour Front government in 1955.[14]

Towards the end of January 1951, members of the Muslim Advisory Board conducted goodwill sessions in rural areas of Singapore with the object of dispelling rumours, providing the true facts of the Maria Her-

togh case and admonishing the Muslims to maintain cordial relations with non-Muslims.[15] Although most Muslims were progressively pacified by such initiatives, remnants of dissatisfaction within the community prevailed. A case in point was the demand for places of religious instruction by Malay firemen at the Geylang Fire Station. Even though the fire station was located adjacent to a mosque, the firemen reasoned that no classes could be conducted therein as the mosque was built solely for the purposes of prayer and worship. The British saw the issue as one that could potentially re-ignite Muslim discontent towards the colonial state. Acquiescing to Muslim demands would also set a precedent for civil servants of other religious faiths to agitate for similar facilities. The Singapore Municipal Commission conducted extensive investigations, and discussions were held with the firemen. After a long-drawn debate, the request was rejected.[16]

On 8 January, Sardon Jubir exhorted members of the public to inform him of specific incidents of abuse by the police during the riots and in their aftermath (*Melayu Raya*, 8 January 1951). The Singapore Malay Union established the 'Muslim Welfare Committee' four days later; its primary task was to assist Muslim and non-Muslim families who were in dire straits.[17] A voluntary contribution of $1,173 was collected from sympathizers and donors within and outside Singapore. The committee also distributed $20 worth of aid to each of more than 70 families, most of which were Malays, Indian Muslims and Eurasians. The number of families in crisis as a result of the riots rose rapidly to 145 a few months later. To further alleviate the extent of the suffering experienced by Muslims, the Singapore Muslim League distributed bags of rice and packages of meat to the families of detainees.[18] Another relief committee, presided over by Syed Abdullah bin Yahya, informed the press that $200 had been raised and that only 37 pieces of clothing had been distributed. An appeal was made for members of the public to contribute generously to its cause. The Muslim Advisory Board, meanwhile, stepped up its visits to the homes of crisis-stricken families to show its support (*Straits Times*, 13 January 1951).

As expected, Singapore's governor built upon the pacification efforts and came to the aid of Muslims in Singapore and, at his own discretion, reiterated the benevolent nature of Britain's rule of the colony. During a tea party at the Raffles Hotel attended by representatives of the various religious faiths, Gimson spoke of the impartiality and independence of the British courts. He stressed that the maintenance of law and order was of 'prime importance to all those who wish to worship in a country of more than one religion.' Members of all religions should work hand in hand with the government to prevent disorder and chaos. 'Muslim subjects of the King', said the governor, 'have always held a high place in His Majesty's regard and have always been considered as

among his most loyal supporters. The Muslim community in Singapore has, therefore, a high reputation to maintain and I hope that they will do nothing to besmirch this reputation and so to bring themselves and their religion into disrepute' (*Utusan Melayu*, 13 January 1951 and *Straits Times*, 13 January, 1951). At this juncture, it is worthwhile to state that Gimson's discourse on governmental non-interference in legislative processes in Singapore was far from truthful. Instead, officials from the Colonial Office had requested that the British court in Singapore declare the marriage between Mansoor Adabi and Maria Hertogh null and void.[19] In the realm of Muslim affairs, Singapore's governor had taken the proactive action of conducting secret negotiations with the aim of inducing Muslim leaders to dissolve the marriage in accordance with the laws of Islam. However, all was in vain.[20] Mansoor Adabi was more than convinced to pursue his appeal at the Singapore High Court.

Efforts at reconciliation were also directed at compensating those who had sustained injuries or had lost property during the riots. An announcement was made pertaining to the disbursement of claims to be considered on an ex-gratia basis. 'Compensation will be met for injury (including fatal injury), damage, thefts or destruction of property in the riots. No compensation will be paid to anyone who was a party or accessory to the riots. Claims should be sent to the Colonial Secretary's Office before February 28 (*Straits Times*, 24 January 1951).' There was, however, the problem of determining the appropriate amount of compensation to be disbursed. Some among Singapore's residents argued that they should be compensated for 'pain' and 'suffering'; concepts that were laden with subjectivities and were open to contestation. There were others who contended that inflationary rates should be factored into the compensation scheme, as the price of cars rose sharply after the riots (*Straits Times*, 25 January, 1951). To address these ambiguities, a tribunal was established to consider all of the cases. In the meantime, the Social Welfare Department obtained updates and rendered financial assistance to more than 140 riot victims. The Singapore Municipal Commission followed suit by paying for property damages incurred by civil servants. One of the cases that had been brought to light was that of a European officer whose car had been damaged by rioters. He was compensated in accordance to guidelines provided by the government (*Utusan Melayu*, 26 January 1951 and *Singapore Free Press*, 2 and 8 February 1951).

Partly due to the influence of Syed Ibrahim bin Omar Alsagoff and Dato Onn, a British political report observed that Muslims in Singapore were slowly regaining their trust in the British.[21] Even so, Muslim elites advocated that the riot victims, as well as Muslim women who had been widowed or whose husbands had been detained, be provided with monetary and other forms of aid by the government. The release of the innocent among the accused should also be expedited to dispel allega-

tions of abuses of justice. Gimson and the Singapore Colonial Secretary assured the public that the government would protect the rights of the innocent (*Proceedings of the First Legislative Council, Colony of Singapore* 1951: B78).

Three Key Challenges in Reconciliation

The months that followed were devoted to contending with three key challenges, which could either redeem or disrupt the colonial administration's efforts to reconcile the various parties in both the local and international arenas. The first challenge was the establishment of an impartial tribunal to compensate various parties who had suffered from the loss of kin and property during the riots. To avoid mismanagement in that regard, the Colonial Office instructed Gimson to obtain and study several reports of tribunals that were conducted in the Gold Coast, Aden and Uganda.[22] Three distinguished people, Sir Han Hoe Lim (a medical practitioner and a member of Executive Council), S.C. Leech (general manager of Boustead & Co.) and L. Cresson (a local businessman well-known for his public service) were subsequently selected as members of the Tribunal Committee upon the invitation of the Singapore Colonial Secretary (*Singapore Free Press*, 22 May 1951). The Tribunal was provided with the following terms of reference:

1. To inquire into any claims received from any person, other than a person who was a party or accessory to the rioting, for compensation for injury (including in the case of fatal injury claims by dependants for compensation), damage, theft, or destruction of property arising directly out of riots in Singapore on 11 and 12 December, 1950;
2. To assess, in the case of damage to property, the financial loss suffered in each case on the basis of value at the time of the loss and in the case of personal injuries appropriate compensation; and
3. To recommend to the government, in cases where the claimant shows that he or she has suffered or will suffer hardship, an amount to be paid ex-gratia from Government funds.[23]

Theoretically, these terms of reference seemed ideal and achievable. The practice was altogether different, however. Recalling his role in considering hundreds of appeals for compensation, Richard Middleton-Smith asserted that the tribunal was fair in its disbursement of funds (Interview with Middleton-Smith 1997). This kind of claim exposes the problems of the validity and reliability of oral sources. Indeed, in his oft-cited essay on oral history methodology, Alessandro Portelli asserted that oral testimonies are, more often than not, fraught with 'errors, inventions and myths', tainting facts beyond their actual motifs (Portelli

1991: 2). The task of a historian is thus to interrogate and expose prejudiced representations embedded in oral accounts by cross-examining them with alternative sources in order to come up, as much as possible, with historical truths.

A close examination of the documents relating to the inner mechanics of the tribunal demystifies the rhetoric of impartiality, which Middleton-Smith had asserted during his interview. In actual fact, the eventual ex-gratia payments were governed by political considerations and biases on the part of the Tribunal Committee. For example, full payment was made for all claims that had been submitted by the Dutch Consulate.[24] The tribunal reported that, although the application with respect to the damages incurred by the Dutch Consulate was not supported by sufficient evidence, 'in this case, *diplomatic courtesy would apply* [italics mine]'. Similar applications by other foreign government agencies were, however, rejected on the grounds that they had presented their claims simultaneously to insurance agencies.[25] Partiality was also displayed towards relatives of Europeans and Eurasians who were injured or killed during the riots. All applications for compensation from civilians belonging to these two ethnic groups were approved and widows of servicemen received a pension and monetary awards ranging from $10,000 to $20,000.[26] It was different in the case of Asians, however. Only the dependents of 27-year-old Indian Police Inspector A. Ratnasingham, who was killed near the Joo Chiat police station during his attempt to save the life of a Dutch girl, were compensated a total of $2,280 and a pension (*Straits Times*, 15 June 1951). The claims of the dependants of five Chinese men who had died during the riots were categorically rejected. However, one member of the Tribunal Committee contested this decision. Two other committee members overruled him by providing suggestive evidence from the coroner's reports that the five deceased men had died of bullet wounds, which, to some, indicated that the five men had been rioters who had confronted the military. The tribunal report was also silent on the issue of the applications from dependants of Malays who were killed during the riots, as they were generally perceived as perpetrators of violence and thus undeserving of compensation. $93,000 was handed out to the dependants of seven people who had been killed, $28,491.50 for 29 people who were injured, $16,774 for damage to personal property and $71,995.57 for the 116 vehicles that had been destroyed by the rioters. The total amount of money disbursed was $210, 261.07.[27] Fully aware of biases inherent in the compensation process, the government ensured that the full details of the tribunal report were never going to be made public. The Singapore Colonial Secretary asserted that it was 'not considered to be in the public interest' for the report to be published verbatim (*Proceedings of the First Legislative Council, Colony of Singapore* 1951: B183).

The second diplomatic challenge the British were forced to confront was that of Maria Hertogh's domicile. British officials in the Colonial and Foreign Offices were particularly anxious about poor management potentially further destabilizing ties with the Netherlands and the wider Muslim world. Concurring with the advice of the Muslim Advisory Board, Gimson admonished officials in Whitehall to leave the final decision to Maria Hertogh, that is, to either reside with her family in the Netherlands or to be repatriated to Singapore in the custody of her stepmother, Che Aminah. Public opinion in Singapore, Gimson argued, 'would be very strongly opposed to any attempt to force the child back to Singapore against her will whatever the Courts might decide on the point of law'.[28] British officials in London were unsure of the implications of Gimson's suggestion. A diplomat was dispatched to convince politicians in the Netherlands to support the proposition that Maria Hertogh be allowed to decide on her preferred domicile pending the appeal case in the Singapore High Court. The strategy failed. Having signed a bond of $7500 on the undertaking that Maria Hertogh would be promptly sent back to Singapore during the appeal hearing in March, Dutch authorities displayed much reluctance as the Roman Catholic lobby in the country refused to engage in to any form of friendly negotiations with Muslims.[29]

The problem of language further complicated the already complex state of affairs. Having been nurtured and cared for by Che Aminah, Maria Hertogh was only fluent in the Malay language. To address such linguistic barriers, the Muslim Advisory Board nominated a senior member of the organisation to conduct the interview with Maria Hertogh. The British, however, foresaw the danger of being accused of siding with the Muslims. It was anticipated that the Dutch in turn would request that a Roman Catholic representative be present during the interview, and this would provide the basis for protests by Muslims throughout Malaya. After much deliberation, a well-respected Pakistani Charge d'Affaires who was conversant in both the English and Malay languages was selected to conduct the interview with Maria Hertogh, accompanied by a Dutch interpreter.[30] An unofficial Catholic representative was also allowed to attend. Meanwhile, the press was denied access to the interview. In August 1951, the Singapore Supreme Court rejected Mansoor Adabi's appeal against the annulment of his marriage and granted Maria Hertogh's parents full custody of their child. The scheduled interview with Maria Hertogh was called off. In a blatant attempt to cushion the impact of the legal verdict upon Muslim public opinion, Gimson suggested that an educational scholarship be awarded to Mansoor Adabi. Higham argued against this suggestion because it would have been perceived by Muslims as 'hush money'.[31] The idea was subsequently dropped upon the advice of several members of the Muslim Advisory Board.

The third challenge to the colonial state's attempt at reconciliation was to be found in the residual grievances arising from comments made by several local Anglophone and European leaders. Malays in Malaya were upset by Dato Onn's critique of their innate tendency to act in a rash manner, as evidenced by the riots. 'Not only the administration', Dato Onn remarked, 'but 80 per cent of Singapore's residents lost confidence in us because of the action of a comparative few'. UMNO members were also advised to steer clear of destructive acts, which would disrupt the notable efforts of Malays working for various governmental agencies. The peace and freedom of the country must be protected (*Majlis*, 26 February, 1951). Reflecting upon the incident, the former Prime Minister of Malaysia, Tengku Abdul Rahman highlighted that it marked his 'first disagreement with Dato Onn' (Tunku 1977: 190).

Similarly, Muslim and non-Muslim elites in Singapore and Malaya voiced their fundamental disagreement with Dato Onn's negative portrayal of the Malays. A joint statement by the Singapore Muslim League, the Hindu Board, the Malayan Chinese Association (M.C.A.) and the Straits Chinese British Association (S.C.B.A.) stated that it was erroneous to place all the blame on the entire Malay community for the wrongdoings of a few 'irresponsible' elements in the course of the riots. In actuality, a majority of Malays in Singapore had displayed courage in sheltering Europeans and Eurasians who might otherwise have been mauled by the rioters (*Utusan Melayu*, 28 February, 1951). Almost a month later, another disturbing comment was made by the chairman of the Singapore Chamber of Commerce. A.F. Taylor told *Straits Times* that the British should act swiftly and ruthlessly in the face of those who sought to take the law into their own hands. Only then can the possibility of another outbreak of violence be averted (*Straits Times*, 31 March 1951). The British, meanwhile, refused to side with either of the feuding parties. This policy of inaction provided non-state organisations the crucial opportunity to pursue activism and social change. The Hindu Association, for example, formed an inter-communal body to consider aid to the innocent people tried after the December riots. This association also aided in the process of fostering harmony and goodwill between Muslims and non-Muslims in Singapore, the relations between which had been severely undermined by the riots (*Straits Times*, 23 February 1951).

In an attempt to further rectify the relationship between Muslims and the colonial state, the British acquiesced to their religious demands and paid tribute to the contribution of the minority community in the development of Singapore and Malaya. The Municipal Commission assented to various requests by both Muslim and non-Muslim civil servants to be relieved of having to perform tasks that were contrary to their religious beliefs. This shift in policy stemmed from the demands of a nurse who had applied for an exemption from family planning

campaigns. The nurse argued that the campaigns contradicted her religious beliefs (*Straits Times*, 21 July 1951). Meanwhile, the 18-member Muslim Advisory Board was expanded by the addition of three prominent personalities: Mahmood bin Abdul Wahab (a former Police Inspector), Syed Abdullah bin Yahya (the President of the Singapore Arab Union) and Haji Jubir Haji Amin (a committee member of *Jamiyah*) (*Government Gazette*, no. 66, vol. VI, May 1951). During the launch of the first comprehensive Malay Arts and Crafts Exhibition, Malcolm Macdonald capitalized on this opportune moment to argue against the 'completely mistaken theory that Malays were an inferior people who needed special protection in their own country.' Rather, the Malays had been as successful as the Indians and the Chinese in the economic and artistic spheres. Another area, in which Malays had excelled, was in the field of politics and governance. Malcolm Macdonald cited the names of several Malay politicians who had won the respect of all communities in Malaya (*Straits Times*, 11 July 1951). To a great extent, Malcolm Macdonald's positive portrayal of the Malays undermines Edward Said's essentialist notions that the British and the West in general had promoted consistently denigrating representations of the Orient in the postwar era (Said 2003: 255-288). Conversely, in an age of decolonization, the Orient had, in many instances, been appropriated as an equal, if not, dominant partner in an East-West relationship.

Conclusion

By the end of 1951, a shift in attitudes among Muslims in Singapore was palpable; however, it would be misleading to assert that the entrenched feelings against the British as rulers had been fully assuaged. Realising the futility of engaging in violent acts to achieve their objectives, Muslim trade union activists, journalists, teachers, writers and middle-class professionals became deeply involved in party politics to advance their religious and social interests. At a meeting held within *Jamiyah*'s premises, Singapore UMNO (or SUMNO) emerged as a section of UMNO's branch in Johore. More than 50 Malays and Arabs registered as members of the new political party. Syed Ahmad bin Mohammed Alsagoff was elected its first President. Ahmad Ibrahim and Darus Shariff, two personalities who played crucial roles and had gained widespread popularity during the Maria Hertogh controversy, were elected Vice-President and Secretary respectively (*Utusan Melayu*, 31 December, 1951; *Straits Times*, 31 December, 1951). The party's membership increased steadily in the months that followed, with a strong following among servicemen in the Navy, the Army and the Police. In July 1953, a motion was passed by the UMNO Central Branch in Kuala

Lumpur for SUMNO to participate in Singapore's elections along with Singapore's branch of the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA). Three months later, SUMNO members publicized an appeal for unity between the Malays and Indonesians in Singapore and declared 'that the time has arrived for the two races to expel the imperialists.'[32]

In the realm of diplomacy, relations between the British and the Dutch had been restored. Having granted the custody of Maria Hertogh to her parents and having been awarded compensation for losses incurred during the riots, the Dutch saw themselves as the victors of this controversy. Friendly interactions between Europeans and Eurasians with Malays in particular and Muslims in general returned to normal in early 1952. In his highly acclaimed travel book, *Voices of Asia*, the famous American novelist and travel-writer, James Albert Michener, wrote about a Caucasian man who, although beaten to near death during the riots, had subsequently decided 'to turn my back upon Christianity, confess my sins and become a complete Malay Muslim. I believe now that my future lies with the Malays' (Michener 1952, 131). This is a somewhat exaggerated account of Muslim-Christian relations in Singapore, but there is a grain of truth in it. Although marriages between Catholics and Muslims were regarded as socially taboo, the practice was not uncommon in the ensuing years.[33]

More crucially, in the narratives that followed, I have shown that inter-ethnic relations and interactions were far more dynamic than what has been presented by the entire array of scholarly and popular mediums churned out by the reigning Singapore state and its avatars. As seen from the complex process of reconciliation in the immediate aftermath of the Maria Hertogh riots, it would be erroneous to maintain that communalist tendencies were prevalent in post-WWII Singapore. Mutual cooperation between ethnic, religious and ideological groupings prevailed even in moments of tension and unrest and to deny this fact would entail the suppression of social and historical memories. Indeed, the rhetoric of communalism that is ubiquitous in the writings on Singapore's colonial past is but a teleological construction that has been garnered, less to shed light on our shared history, than to address, more often than not, the anxieties of our time.

Notes

1   For detailed accounts on the causes of the Maria Hertogh riots, see: (Jesudason 1969; Mohamed Ansari 1973; Hughes 1980; Stockwell 1986: 481-513; Haja 1989; Cody 2001; Nordin 2005: 561-575).
2   See also 'Colonial Political Intelligence Summary No. 2, January 1951', CO 537/6797.
3   (Brass 2003, 305-327).

4 'Press Comments on the Hertogh Case and Singapore Riots', RG 59, 746F.00/12-2750, National Archives, College Park, Maryland.

5 'Colonial Political Intelligence Summary No. 2, January 1951', CO 537/6797 and 'Political Summary – 1 December 1950 to 31 January 1951 Part III – Colonial Territories – Singapore', CO 537/7346.

6 'William R. Langdon (American Consul General in Singapore) to Department of State, 20 December, 1950', RG 59, 746F.00/12-2050, National Archives, College Park, Maryland.

7 'Colonial Political Intelligence Summary no. 2, January 1951', CO 537/6797.

8 'Open letter to His Excellency Sir Franklin Charles Gimson', FO 371/93116.

9 'Franklin Gimson to John D. Higham, 18 December, 1950', FO 371/93114.

10 'Philip Nichols to J.D. Murray, 19 December, 1950', FO 371/84677.

11 'Inter-Religious Organisation (Singapore and Johore Bahru)', PRO 23.

12 'Malcolm Macdonald to James Griffiths, 14 January, 1951', CO 537/7302.

13 'Malcolm Macdonald to James Griffiths, 14 January, 1951', CO 537/7302.

14 'Public Relations Officer to the Governor, Singapore', 16 November, 1955, PRO 19.

15 'Extract of Minutes of 21 Meeting held on 12 January 1951, at Kuala Lumpur by Joint Information and Propaganda Committee', CO 537/7302.

16 'Minutes of Meeting of Estates and Fire Brigade Committee held on Tuesday, 19 December, 1950 (I-92/50)', in *Minutes of the Proceedings of the City Council of Singapore, 1950* (Singapore: The Council, 1951); *The Singapore Free Press*, 2 January, 1951 and *Melayu Raya*, 3 January, 1951.

17 'Mohd Salleh (Secretary of Kesatuan Melayu Singapura) to Bashir Mallal, 31 December 1950', Mansoor Adabi Private Papers.

18 'Minutes of Singapore Muslim League Committee Meeting, 20 June, 1951', Mansoor Adabi Private Papers.

19 'John D. Murray to British Embassy (The Hague), 27 April, 1951', FO 371/93116.

20 'Franklin Gimson to John D. Higham, 1 February, 1951', FO 371/93116.

21 'Singapore Political Report for January, 1951', CO 537/7342.

22 'John D. Higham to Sir Franklin Gimson, 16 February, 1951', CO 953/10/2.

23 'Report of the Proceedings of the Riots Claims Tribunal, 19 June, 1951', CO 953/10/2.

24 'Richard Middleton-Smith (Riots Claims Tribunal) to the Colonial Secretary, 6 April, 1951', CO 953/10/2.

25 'Report of the Proceedings of the Riots Claims Tribunal, 19 June, 1951', CO 953/10/2.

26 'Casualties arising from the Riots in Singapore in December, 1950 (Ministry of Pensions), 22 May 1951', CO 953/10/2.

27 'Report of the Proceedings of the Riots Claims Tribunal, 19 June 1951', CO 953/10/2.

28 'Sir Franklin Gimson to John D. Higham, 16 January 1951', FO 371/93114.

29 'Consulate General of the Netherlands, December 1950', CO 953/10/6.

30 'John D. Higham to J.D. Murray, 19 February 1951', FO 371/ 93116.

31 'John D. Higham to Franklin Gimson, 10 September 1951', CO 953/10/6.

32 'Political Report for the period 2 to 18 September 1953', CO 1022/207.

33 'Author's Interview with Ms. Hedwig Anuar, 24 May 2006'. Hedwig Anuar is a Eurasian woman of Portuguese-Catholic origins. She was an undergraduate at the University of Malaya in Singapore when the riots broke out and was married to a Malay-Muslim in the late 1950s. Hedwig was the first Singaporean Director of the National Library, from 1965 to 1988.

5 The Politics of Fires in Post-1950s Singapore and the Making of the Modernist Nation-State

Loh Kah Seng

Introduction

Present-day Singaporeans, four-fifths of whom reside in modern flats built by the Housing and Development Board (henceforth HDB; HDB *AR* 2007: 78) generally do not worry about losing their lives, homes or belongings to an unforeseen blaze. However, while they do not fear fire, many older Singaporeans still remember the infernos of the past, and – what is significant in this closely managed state – often do so independently of the government's representation of the fires. Admittedly, the official story of the biggest conflagration in Singapore's history, the 1961 *Kampong* Bukit Ho Swee inferno, which narrates how the HDB successfully re-housed the fire victims in emergency flats built on the fire site – akin to a modern public housing estate rising literally from its ashes – is told in school textbooks, exhibition galleries and official public histories.[1] However, both elderly and younger Singaporeans also remember the fire in distinctly different ways in homes, coffeeshops and online forums. These opposing memories of the Bukit Ho Swee fire are symptomatic of the contested history of the *kampong* clearance and fires that occurred in the 1950s and 1960s, as well as the ambivalence with which elderly Singaporeans have come to regard that past.

Across space and time, fires have had a profound social and political impact on state-society relations. The outbreak of an inferno, which straddles that grey area between natural cause and human responsibility, is nonetheless merely a 'trigger' of longer-term social pressures, which are demographic, social, economic, and environmental in nature (Blaikie et al. 1994). Fires are thus also political events in that they reveal how successfully the state dealt with a formidable fire hazard. Conversely, blazes are indicative of a community's autonomy and dynamism, which enable ordinary people to build effective formal and informal social networks against the threat of conflagration (Pelling 2003). The tragic Triangle Fire in New York in 1911, where more than 100 female factory workers perished, galvanised the labour movement's fight for safer working conditions in garment factories (Von Drehle 2003).

Conversely, the population of seventeenth-century Edo, Japan, coped with the frequent occurrence of fires by developing property and even building entire houses, which could be easily moved in the event of a fire (Sand 2005).

Urban fires also represent moral opportunities for the authorities to permanently remove damaged buildings and to create a more desirable society on behalf of the fire's victims. The Great Fire of London in 1666 enabled the English monarchy to expand its administrative reach through large-scale, planned redevelopment and housing projects (Bell 1951). Thus, the question of for whom a fire truly constitutes a crisis needs to be studied closely. More recently and closer to Singapore, Hong Kong's public housing programme emerged from a series of severe fires in slums comprised entirely of wooden housing both before and after the great Shek Kip Mei blaze in 1953 (Smart 2006). The sheer scale of the destruction can also unravel hitherto invisible fault lines in society. Persistent social myths about the causes of fires frequently arise from tensions that develop between different groups in society. There was a widespread belief that the Great Chicago Fire in 1871 was started by a cow kicking over a lamp in a barn owned by an Irish family, illustrating the prejudices and stereotypes native-born Americans had towards the immigrant class (Bales 2002).

This chapter examines the historic role of *kampong* fires in Singapore in the making of a modern nation-state. Much like other momentous events that shatter the usual calm of social history, fires are much written about and debated, and also well remembered. They produce both a substantial body of written literature and a rich pool of oral history reminiscences, which constitute the main sources of information for this essay. This chapter argues that the states of emergency created by major urban fires in Singapore in the 1950s and 1960s enabled both the colonial and postcolonial governments to progressively integrate the previously semi-autonomous and physically mobile low-income families living in urban *kampongs* into the social fabric of the imagined nation-state. The chapter begins by discussing how official attempts to clear the *kampongs*, which were depicted as dangerous 'black areas', aroused both spontaneous and organised resistance from their dwellers. It then examines how the authorities variously mobilised *kampong* dwellers and transformed them into loyal citizens of the state, by forming volunteer fire-fighting brigades in the *kampongs* and by re-housing fire victims in emergency public housing. Although the number of fire victims was small in relation to the total number of *kampong* dwellers re-housed for other reasons, the appropriation of the fire site for emergency flats served as a vital platform for the clearance of nearby unauthorised housing. Finally, the chapter brings the past into the present by discussing how the frequent outbreaks of *kampong* fires have produced power-

ful rumours of arson, which continue to persist in contemporary Singapore, creating an uneasy, ambivalent relationship between the citizens and the ruling government.

'Let the vegetables grow on rocks': The Politics of Kampong Clearance

In the 1950s, over fifty urban *kampongs* stood in a discontinuous belt on the margins of Singapore outside the Central Area, the colony's administrative and economic heart. The cheap wooden housing in the *kampongs* were home to a quarter of Singapore's urban population in 1961 (HDB *AR* 1961: 4), largely low-income Chinese nuclear or semi-extended families. Such housing, usually built without official approval, was being erected in large numbers to meet a major spurt in Singapore's population after World War Two. The annual 4.5% rate of population growth between 1947 and 1957 saw a substantial increase in nuclear family life, with men, women and children arriving from China, India and increasingly Malaya after the war to reunite with their spouses or to form new families (Singapore 1955b: 27-29).

The demographic changes resulted in a severe housing shortage in the Central City area, the traditional reception zone for Chinese immigrants. Larger families left their shop-house cubicles for larger wooden homes built on the urban periphery; a 1956 survey revealed that the average size of the households living in wooden dwellings was 4.8 persons, compared to 3.1 for households residing in shop-houses (Goh 1956: 63-66). Indeed many arriving migrants went directly to the urban *kampongs* (Van Grunsven 1983b: 35, 95), where families could keep transport costs low by residing close to their workplace in the centre or in the eastern and western parts of the city (Van Grunsven 1983a, 60). Throughout the 1950s, the urban *kampong* population grew rapidly, doubling from 127,000 in 1947 to 246,000 by the mid-1950s (Singapore 1956: 13). Long-established settlements experienced intense overcrowding as private building contractors illicitly erected wooden houses en masse on previously vacant hills and disused cemeteries and over swamps on the urban fringe.

To the British authorities, the uninhibited movement of low-income families into unauthorised wooden housing was socially undesirable. The Singapore Improvement Trust (SIT), the de facto colonial housing authority, worried that '[h]uts were erected with astonishing rapidity and ... it was difficult to get them demolished ... The situation changed almost from day to day and was very difficult to control' (SIT 1947: 17). The *kampong* dwellers had both physical mobility and economic fluidity. Many breadwinners engaged in irregular, part-time or daily-rated em-

ployment in the informal service sector, either as 'self-employed' work-
ers, such as unlicensed hawkers, rickshaw drivers and 'pirate' taxi
chauffeurs (Singapore 1955a: 21; Brocklehurst 1957: 47), or as casual la-
bour, who were 'paid daily and move at frequent intervals from one job,
and one employer, to another' (Singapore 1957: 3). This work was fre-
quently supplemented by growing vegetables, or rearing poultry or a
few pigs outside one's wooden dwelling, which helped reduce the
household's cost of living. But the combination of irregular employ-
ment in the informal economy and semi-rural economic activities,
much of which was illegal or socially frowned upon, meant that urban
kampong dwellers lived beyond the social discipline imposed by full-
time, regular work in the formal economy (Loh 2007: 21).

The British colonial government also deemed urban *kampongs* to be
places of social danger. The 1947 Housing Committee's influential re-
port likened the autonomous building development in postwar Singa-
pore to a 'disease' of 'gigantism', in which a 'chaotic and unwieldy
megalopolis has been created ... by haphazard and unplanned growth'.
This pell-mell urbanisation, the Committee warned, was 'detrimental to
health and morals' and could only be resolved by 'demolition and re-
housing' (Singapore 1947: 11). The Committee's Chairman, C.W.A. Sen-
nett, also viewed the *kampongs* as 'the nurseries of a C3 nation and
schools for training youth for crime'. Someone could visit, he added, 'if
he likes to risk his personal safety, such unauthorised *kampongs* of *attap*
huts as have sprung up in places such as *Kampong* Silat or Henderson
Road'.[2] Crime was perceived, then, not merely as the province of the
professional criminals but as 'something ordinary and genuinely social'
(Chevalier 1973, 77). These official views were reinforced by the low-in-
come Chinese people's conception of government in starkly negative
terms, for whom the 'notion of "law-abidingness"' amounted to nothing
more than 'keeping out of trouble and not interfering in matters not
[of] one's immediate concern'.[3]

The British colonial regime consequently viewed the growing belt of
unauthorised housing on the urban periphery as what Mary Douglas
termed a dangerously swelling 'margin', where official control was
weakest (Douglas 2002: 150). The authorities, in seeking to restore
authority over this margin, subscribed to, in James Scott's words, a
'high-modernist' philosophy, based on a 'self-confidence about scientific
and technical progress' and 'the rational design of social order commen-
surate with the scientific understanding of natural laws' (Scott 1998, 4).
The solution, it was argued, was to replace the haphazard wooden hous-
ing with planned, modern accommodations. The 1947 Housing Com-
mittee called for the SIT to be given 'proper zoning powers and powers
to plan ahead of development'.[4] In 1955, the colonial government com-
pleted a long-range development plan, called the Master Plan. The Plan

aimed to resettle two-thirds of the urban *kampong* population into permanent housing or planned resettlement areas over the coming 20 years, with the remainder being allowed to remain temporarily in 16 controlled *kampongs* designated as 'tolerated *attap* areas' (Singapore 1955a: 26-28, 51). The remaining *kampongs*, such as Tiong Bahru, Bukit Ho Swee, *Kampong* Soopoo, and parts of the Kallang Basin, were earmarked for complete demolition (Singapore 1955a: 26).

High modernist public housing was not solely a colonial conception. The PAP had its origins as an anti-colonial party that represented the interests of the low-income Chinese population. However, the Fabian socialists in the party led by Lee Kuan Yew, which eventually assumed full control of the PAP, possessed views of housing similar to those held by the British. At an election rally in 1959, the party endorsed modernist concepts of planned neighbourhoods and satellite towns and, significantly, organised *kampongs* (PAP 1959: 28-31). Once elected to power in 1959, the PAP established the HDB, thereby replacing the SIT with a statutory housing authority under the government's direct control with full powers to carry out housing construction.[5] The Board's first five-year building programme aimed to build low-cost housing in planned housing estates on the urban periphery ahead of a longer-term plan to redevelop the entire city area (HDB *AR* 1960: 8-10). The HDB single-mindedly implemented the PAP's campaign against unauthorised wooden housing, holding the view that 'you cannot make an omelette without breaking eggs' (Interview with Tay 6 October 2006).

Throughout the 1950s, an increasingly intense social and political rivalry developed along the margins of the city over the control of the urban *kampongs*. In July 1953, the City Council began to demolish newly erected unauthorised dwellings in the urban area (CC *AR* 1953, 18, 218). The SIT also attempted to clear *kampong* dwellers from its lands to make way for low-cost housing. However, the eviction and clearance processes were hampered by the great difficulty of providing alternative accommodations, agricultural land and compensation for affected dwellers. Two farming families in Kim Keat, when offered accommodations in SIT flats, wanted to know: '[H]ow can you expect us to give up our country lives for the city life? ... In other words, let the vegetables grow on the rocks'.[6] Poor semi-urban dwellers, who supplemented their employment in the city by growing vegetables or rearing poultry, were hit harder by the evictions, since they could not 'move into farming settlements far from their employment nor do they look with favour on the prospect of becoming a tenant of a permanent house' (Singapore 1956: 5).

The attempts to clear the *kampongs* evoked both spontaneous and organised resistance from the residents, described aptly by a Chinese newspaper as 'a lion's roar from the oppressed people' (*NYSP* 1 May 1954). The SIT found that 'most of the squatters have either political

backing or the backing of hooligans or gangsters'.[7] In July 1953, when an SIT demolition team accompanied by two police constables faced off against two families in Geylang Lorong 27 who refused to vacate their wooden houses, the team's very presence aroused 'a hostile crowd of about forty people'.[8] *Kampong* dwellers were also being organised to fight eviction by two left-wing rural associations affiliated to the PAP left, the Singapore Farmers' Association (SFA) and the Singapore Wooden House Dwellers' Association (SWHDA), which each had a membership of 5,000 by early 1956 (Lee 1996: 94, 131). The associations criticised slum clearance under the Master Plan as a typically 'tragic affair', which did not adequately compensate farmers for the loss of their houses, crops and farming equipment (PAP 1956: 4-5, 7). Both associations were removed from the rolls of official organisations for their alleged roles in the countrywide anti-British riots of October 1956. However, many of their former members joined the Singapore Country People's Association (SCPA) and the Singapore Rural Residents' Association (SRRA), also affiliated with the PAP left (Lee 1996, 137). The associations were deeply involved in the social life of the urban *kampongs*, organising the young men into crime patrols and helping to repair wooden houses. They also organised sewing classes, kindergartens, and literacy classes (Interviews with Chin 24 November 2006; Chio 7 March 2007), activities with a 'strong Chinese Communist flavour'.[9]

Mobilisation against Fire: The Volunteer Fire-fighting Brigades

The PAP's mobilisation of *kampong* dwellers against eviction, through the SCPA and SRRA, represented one way of penetrating into the 'black areas'. Fire opened a second route. The densely built-up areas of wooden housing, which lacked adequate fire safety precautions, were very vulnerable to fire. Serious conflagrations occurred in two zones of unauthorised wooden housing flanking the Central City: southwest of the Singapore River and north and east of the Rochor and Kallang Rivers. A survey of the Fire Department's Annual Reports between 1949 and 1970 reveals common fires were part of the rhythm of everyday *kampong* life (FD, 1949-1962; SFB 1963-1970). 'Light thrown down', 'rubbish fires' and the 'sun's rays striking broken glass' could be attributed to the discarding of or failure to remove used or unwanted items from the *kampong*; '*joss* burning' to religious worship and celebrations within the home or nearby; 'sparks from fires and stoves' to household chores and the use of firewood for cooking; and 'fireworks' and 'children playing with matches', to festive celebrations and recreation in the *kampong*'s open spaces.

But, the *kampong* blazes largely arose from the social and political distance between the state and the *kampong*-dwelling population. Admittedly, the highly combustible wooden housing and *attap* roofs and the worsening traffic congestion on the city's trunk roads were important contributing factors (SFD 1951: 1; 1953: 1). However, as fire department officer Arthur Lim Beng Lock explained, the colonial fire service had also acquired a reputation among the Chinese for fire site pilfering, with its fire engines labelled *pah chiu chia* ('robbery vehicles'). In the PAP era, mobile water pumps were closely associated with *kampong* eviction operations and commonly viewed as being 'on another URA (Urban Renewal Authority) job', which refers to the statutory board established by the PAP government to clear the Central Area. In the event of a fire, *kampong* dwellers, as Arthur Lim recalled, 'tended to want to pull our hoses and try to get water to protect their own properties' (Interview with Lim 7 January 1994). The Fire Brigade, in turn, claimed that, among *kampong* dwellers, 'there was practically no one in the least fire-minded' (SFD 1958: 10).

It was the PAP that sought to inform urban *kampong* dwellers about fire hazards and, crucially, it did so from both within official circles and from the political margins of the anti-colonial movement. The party's aim, as Lee Kuan Yew declared later, was to bridge 'the gap to the Chinese-educated world – a world teeming with vitality, dynamism and revolution' (Lee 1962: 10-11). Following the PAP's victory in the 1957 City Council elections, the Council became a forum for engaging urban *kampong* dwellers. Ong Eng Guan, a party leader who became the first Mayor of the city, proclaimed a 'new *kampong* policy', in which '[t]he poorest people living in places like Chinatown, and those in the *kampongs* like Geylang or *Kampong* Silat ... shall have first priority in our development programme' (CC *MP* 30 June 1958). He pledged to improve *kampong* roads, build more standpipes, supply electricity, and establish maternity and infant welfare clinics as well as mobile clinics in the *kampongs* (CC *MP* 6 Jan 1958). A final and most ambitious measure was fire prevention. The great *Kampong* Koo Chye fire of April 1958 provided the catalyst. In the following month, the City Council authorised the Fire Brigade to form and train volunteer fire-fighting squads in 36 urban *kampongs* to 'deal with outbreaks of fire and hold them in check pending the arrival of the Brigade' (*SFD* 1958: 1). Each squad had a minimum of 20 men and was provided with basic fire-fighting equipment. In the following year, the fire-fighting squads helped to extinguish more than 15 *kampong* fires (SFD 1961, 11).

Concurrently, the PAP sponsored similar volunteer squads through its rural and old boys' associations in the *kampongs*. Bukit Ho Swee's fire-fighting squads, according to Tay Ah Chuan, a member of one such team, recruited from the local SRRA branch and the old boys' associa-

tions of the two Chinese-medium primary schools in the *kampong* (Interview with Tay 21 February 2006). The primary aim of the PAP-organised squads, which distinguished them from the Fire Brigade-trained teams, was to prevent acts of arson. Chio Cheng Thun, an SRRA organiser in Lorong Tai Seng, explained, 'When *kampong* dwellers faced eviction, we organised fire-fighting squads for fear that the landlord would set fire to the houses. If you didn't want to move and if they burned your house, you naturally had to move out, then they could develop the land' (Interview with Chio 7 March 2007).

The fire-fighting squads were a political success, although they were helpless when a small *kampong* fire mushroomed into a raging inferno. In *Kampong* Tiong Bahru, before the blaze of February 1959 left 5,220 people homeless, volunteer squads had successfully contained a fire in three *attap* houses less than two months earlier (*ST* 16 February 1959). Similarly, two cases of arson in Bukit Ho Swee were reportedly put out successfully by its residents in 1960, before the gigantic fire of 1961 swept through the *kampong* (*NYSP* 26 May 1961). Unemployed or casually employed young men, who would have otherwise spent their free time chatting in coffeeshops or engaged in secret society activities, enthusiastically volunteered their time and effort (Chua 1989, 1008). Tay Yan Woon, a *kampong* dweller, recalled that 'people said that Bukit Ho Swee was being evicted, and everybody had to guard their houses. There were people keeping watch in shifts in the middle of the night because they were afraid that someone might come along and set a fire' (Interview with Tay 28 Sep 2006).

The fire-fighting squads, however, had only a brief political lifespan. By the mid-1960s, the teams, which had been useful for mobilising the wooden house population, had become redundant. In 1965, the PAP government declared that it would clear all of the urban *kampongs* that constituted a fire hazard (HDB *AR* 1965: 23-24). The volunteer squads disappeared when their *kampongs* were either destroyed by fire or cleared for development. By 1971, only 13 squads of the original 38 formed in 1958 remained, testimony to the pragmatic policy of the PAP government to socialise urban *kampong* dwellers into becoming citizens of the high-modernist nation-state.

Mobilisation after a Fire: The Development of Emergency Housing

Besides mobilising *kampong* dwellers for fire prevention, the re-housing operations in the aftermath of fires were also valuable opportunities for the state to reconstitute the structure of society. The social emergencies created by infernos, which left large numbers of low-income families without their homes and possessions, gave the state the moral authority

to act on behalf of the victims, by re-housing them in planned, modern accommodations built atop the sit of devastating fire. Although they seemed to be non-political events, *kampong* fires justified the government's efforts to swiftly relocate fire victim families en masse into regulated housing and integrate them into the social fabric of the new nation-state (Clancey 2004: 45). There was, however, a small window of opportunity: the state had to act with political resolve and speed in order to neutralise the efforts and desires of the victims to return to their *kampong* to rebuild their wooden homes on the site of the fire.

Throughout the 1950s, the British colonial and Labour Front governments struggled to provide permanent housing for victims of *kampong* fires. In the first great postwar inferno at *Kampong* Bugis in August 1951, which rendered 3,000 people homeless, the SIT was commissioned to build emergency housing for the victims. These semi-permanent housing units, which might only last 40-50 years compared to the usual 60-100 years for more permanent housing,[10] could be constructed quickly and cheaply and rented out to low-income families. But the Trust rejected emergency housing as 'uneconomical' and 'undesirable', because it would probably incur high maintenance costs and that, 'unless strict control is maintained, they will degenerate into slums'.[11] The government, stunningly, left the re-housing responsibility to the Singapore Joint Relief Organisation (SJRO), a newly formed body chaired by a British official but composed of representatives of leading charitable organisations. The SJRO aimed to build 300 three-room homes on Kolam Ayer Lane for the fire victims but had still only completed 96 units two years later. In 1954, the Fire Superintendent, when asked to rank the various urban *kampongs* by fire risk, listed the rebuilt *Kampong* Bugis at no. 13.[12]

However, the high building costs of the standard housing, which it preferred forced the Trust to conduct a minor experiment in emergency housing. In 1953, 25 prototype low-cost houses were built at the Upper Aljunied resettlement area.[13] The experiment became useful for the SIT during the two *kampong* fires in Geylang that year – at Lorong 3 and Aljunied Road – where 2,835 and over 1,000 people respectively lost their homes. The Trust quickly built 190 two-room emergency units at the Upper Aljunied resettlement area and 136 three-room emergency units at Kolam Ayer Lane.[14] Both sites were also earmarked for low-rental public housing, launching the government's first attempts to carry out a social transformation on a fire site.[15] However, the response to the emergency housing was disappointing: out of the over 882 families affected by the two fires, only 415 families eventually accepted the emergency housing or SIT accommodations elsewhere (SIT *AR* 1953, 54). Disappointed, the Trust scaled its emergency housing policy down in 1955 (SIT *AR* 1955, 20). In the *Kampong* Tiong Bahru fire in September

of that year, the government simply allowed the 792 victims to 'rebuild accommodations themselves within the area of the fire'.[16]

The Labour Front government, elected in 1955, took a unique step forward during the next inferno at *Kampong* Koo Chye in April 1958. It declared that it would purchase the site of the fire, use portions of public donations collected for the 2,000 fire victims to build public housing on the site and *sell* the houses back to them. Chief Minister Lim Yew Hock viewed the fire as providing a valuable opportunity to redesign Singapore, warning that '[i]n these congested areas of wooden houses which are the symbols of the old Singapore, which we are striving to replace, fire, although accidentally started, spreads quickly and destructively, and creates havoc before it can be brought under control' (Lim 6 April 1958). In a landmark decision, the Trust purchased the fire's site under the Land Acquisition Ordinance. In March 1959, the Legislative Assembly instructed the SIT to construct 192 two-storey, three-room terrace houses for the fire victims (*SLAD* 18 March 1959, 2229). But the project again was not a complete success. Of the 329 families, only 196 families applied for the new houses, which they were only able to inhabit at the end of 1960.

Lim Yew Hock had, meanwhile, adopted a more comprehensive emergency housing policy because, to put it simply, the political climate had changed. The replacement of unauthorised wooden dwellings by modern housing had become an important issue in Singapore's progress towards nationhood. The Labour Front government, albeit reelected on a slim margin, had partial control of the island's domestic affairs, including housing, while the more left-wing PAP held sway in the City Council. Within a year of the Koo Chye fire, both parties would contest the general elections of May 1959 in the hope of presiding over a self-governing state. The relief efforts surrounding the Koo Chye fire were highly politicised, leading the Social Welfare Department to ban the PAP, Labour Front and Workers' Party from the relief centre's premises. The Department explained that '[w]e do not want to allow a tragedy to be exploited for political propaganda purposes' (ST 8 April 1958).

The Koo Chye fire also invigorated the emergency housing programme. In 1958, the Planning Coordination Committee, which advised the government on the development of land in Singapore, concluded that 'the possibility of evolving an economic type of semi-permanent housing estates with the advantages of speedy, low-cost construction must not be denied and experiments must continue'.[17] Above all, the emergency housing programme could serve as an interim measure to accommodate low-income families, who would not otherwise have chosen to leave their cheap wooden housing, before they could be relocated in more permanent housing.[18]

When a second fire in *Kampong* Tiong Bahru rendered 5,220 persons homeless in February 1959, its proximity to the general elections raised the political stakes involved. The *Sin Chew Jit Poh* emphasised that the relief work for the fire victims constituted the 'first step' in the country's practice of self-government (*SCJP* 14 February 1959). In the City Council, when Ong Eng Guan turned down a motion from Lee Bah Chee, the Liberal Socialist Councillor for Tiong Bahru, to raise the Council's contribution for the victims, Lee demanded that since there had been two serious fires during Ong's tenure as mayor, he should return to his hometown in Batu Pahat (CC *MP* 3 March 1959, 18)! The fire politicking got even worse in the Legislature, a sign that *kampong* blazes had attained a newfound political importance at the highest level of politics. Lee Kuan Yew accused Lim Yew Hock of seeking publicity during the calamity, referring to Lim's photograph on the front page of the *Straits Times* the day after the fire, showing him at the fire site with his shirt sleeves and trousers rolled up and holding a bucket to douse the *attap* roofs (*ST* 14 February 1959). Lim countered that 'there was a PAP propaganda machine out there saying that the government was responsible for the fire!' (*SLAD* 3 March 1959, 2059).

Most crucially, the Tiong Bahru fire set the government on a substantially broader course of emergency housing development. S.C. Woolmer, the SIT's Chief Architect, urged that '[t]he fire, however tragic it was for the victims, creates an opportunity to carry out demolition and redevelopment efforts, not only in the area of the fire itself, but of a substantial portion of the rest of the existing slum', which would 'provide accommodations for more occupants in the area than previously, with a far higher standard of living'.[19] With most fire victims temporarily re-housed in Kallang Estate, the disaster provided the government with a strategic foothold in *Kampong* Tiong Bahru to commence its emergency housing project. Lim Yew Hock declared that the government would acquire the site and build low-cost houses for them within three months (*SS* 18 February 1959).

The government's goal was to build a combination of two-storey terraced houses and five- and nine-storey flats, totalling 1,015 flats and shops, at the site of the fire.[20] The authorities, under the Land Acquisition Ordinance, purchased 37 acres of land, including 13½ acres of the site. Unlike the plans after the Koo Chye fire, the Tiong Bahru emergency housing was rental housing, because 'this will, it is hoped, be the first phase of a larger *kampong* clearance and redevelopment effort, it would not appear that these properties would be suitable for sale'.[21] The authorities also acquired 16 acres of the disused Tiong Bahru cemetery nearby, on which the SIT planned to erect another 1,360 units, mainly one-room flats.[22] The cemetery had attracted official interest as a possible site for emergency housing in as early as October 1956.[23] In fact, in

January 1959, the authorities had again recommended it as suitable for multi-storey emergency housing.[24] The Tiong Bahru fire, then, provided the moral justification for the government to acquire the cemetery.

The Tiong Bahru fire site plans were finally realised in early 1961, nearly two years after the inferno. The HDB, which had replaced the SIT in February 1960, charged low rents to the fire victims, since 'sufficient would appear to have been done for the fire victims in re-housing them over the last 2 years'.[25] In April 1961, however, 452 of the 1,016 victim families decided to stay in Kallang Estate, where the rent was subsidised, with 397 families living in their own accommodations, presumably in unauthorised wooden housing near the fire site. Only 167 families accepted the Tiong Bahru emergency flats, mostly the larger units. All 91 of the three-room terraced houses were taken up by fire victims, but only 72 of the 190 two-room flats and a mere five of the 280 one-room flats with communal latrines.[26]

Bukit Ho Swee: The Turning Point

The Bukit Ho Swee fire of May 1961 was the biggest fire in Singapore's history, destroying 2,200 dwellings and rendering 2,833 families (or 15,694 people) homeless. However, it was the subsequent emergency re-housing, which distinguished it historically from the *kampong* blazes of the 1950s. The PAP's response, unlike those of the British and Labour Front governments, was characterised by political resolve and speed. On 30 May, Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew promised that '[i]n nine months' time a sufficient number of units will be completed by the Housing and Development Board to house every fire victim family' (*ST* 30 May 1961). In a special Legislative Assembly session convened the following day, the PAP government passed a motion to acquire the site for rebuilding and amended the Land Acquisition Ordinance to enable the government to acquire sites at one-third of the value of the land (*SLAD* 31 May 1961, 1565-66). The educated public similarly understood the importance of the re-housing operation in the creation of the new state. The *Nanyang Siang Pau* urged that since [t]he observance of law and regulations is the first lesson for the citizens', 'citizens will cultivate good civic habits and refrain from building unauthorised houses for their own convenience, thus marring the look of the city and sowing the cause for future fires' (*NYSP* 15 June 1961).

By the time of the Bukit Ho Swee fire, the HDB, unlike the SIT, had also adopted a clear policy towards emergency housing. Although the Board viewed the two-room flat as its minimum housing standard, it accepted the necessity of building at least 10,000 one-room flats, most of

which served as emergency units, near the Central Area of Singapore as a short-term measure to house the low-income population living in inexpensive wooden and shop-house accommodations. The Board's members recognised that the 'political considerations were more pressing and that the Housing Board might have to sacrifice its ideas on what units should be constructed'.[27] In November 1960, the PAP government had instructed the Board to continue the SIT's experiment with one-room emergency housing.[28] Within a week of the Bukit Ho Swee fire, a preliminary plan to redevelop the site had already been prepared,[29] while the HDB made the rebuilding of Bukit Ho Swee its top priority.[30]

In September 1961, the 904 one-room emergency flats at the Tiong Bahru cemetery site, partially-built at the time of the May fire, were completed. More than 700 of the flats were allocated to the Bukit Ho Swee fire victims. The first of the HDB's building phases on the Bukit Ho Swee fire site itself was only completed in November 1962, 18 months after the fire, with two subsequent phases that were realised in early 1965. By the end of 1963, of the 2,600 families registered with the HDB for re-housing, 2,166 families had been successfully accommodated.[31] That year, the Board proudly declared that '[t]he appearance of the Bukit Ho Swee Fire Site had been completely changed from one of the most congested slums in Singapore into a healthy housing estate with modern community services and amenities' (HDB *AR* 1963, 28). The HDB consequently could be very thankful to the SIT for having commenced construction on the cemetery site after the 1959 Tiong Bahru fire. The Board partially acknowledged the strategic knock-on effects of fires in removing the urban *kampongs*:

> Singapore has just experienced two of its worst fires in recent years, one in *Kampong* Tiong Bahru and the other in Bukit Ho Swee, and it is a rather ironic coincidence that the flats erected at the first fire site were completed just in time to house the victims of the second fire (HDB *AR* 1961: 22).

Bukit Ho Swee Estate was a high-modernist housing estate, in which formerly semi-autonomous *kampong* dwellers were being moulded into disciplined citizens. The development of public housing constituted, Lim Kim San, the first Chairman of the HDB in 1964 proclaimed 'a minor revolution in the social and living habits of a sizeable portion of the population' (PAP 1964: 228). Residents were instructed, among other things, not to keep livestock in their homes, obstruct the common corridors and stairways, illegally sublet the flat, or make unauthorised alterations to the flat (HDB 1973: 5). Moreover, its social amenities sought to draw former *kampong* dwellers firmly into its official orbit.

The estate's community centre, completed in 1965, sought to transform the local youth into 'loyal and efficient young people to collectively shoulder the responsibility in nation building' (NAS 1966a). The hawkers and street sellers also fell under more official regulations. In 1966, at the opening of a 2-storey street sellers' centre on the estate, a government official enthused that hawkers would no longer block traffic or present health hazards and could now 'do their business in sheltered comfort', while the residents could 'enjoy the many varieties of cooked food in clean, sanitary surroundings' (NAS 1966b).

Crucially, the Bukit Ho Swee flats served as a springboard for the government's *kampong* clearance operations and, subsequently, its urban renewal programme to clear the shop-house dwellings in the Central Area. Out of this social transformation of the urban margins, and thereafter by the urban core, the HDB announced that 'a planned new city will be built'.[32] The key to urban renewal was to first resettle the families from the Central Area into flats built on the urban periphery. As Teh Cheang Wan, the HDB's Chief Architect, later remarked, the Board's 'construction plans would have run into difficulties if not for the God-sent opportunity of the Bukit Ho Swee fire in 1961, where a site was made available for 10,000 housing'.[33] Two-thirds of the people who eventually moved into the Bukit Ho Swee Estate were not victims of the 1961 fire, however. In September 1962, a number of two- and three-room flats in the estate were reserved for *kampong* families affected by the clearance of nearby Redhill for industrial and housing development.[34] In July 1963, another cluster of flats was allocated, in order of priority, to evicted families from the clearance areas; victims of the Bukit Ho Swee fire; victims of the Bukit Ban Kee fires; and general applicants on the housing register.[35] After the 1963 Bukit Ban Kee blaze, the HDB temporarily rehoused 206 of the 230 fire victim families in Bukit Ho Swee. In October 1964, the Board made more vacant flats in the estate available to applicants evicted from nearby South Precinct 1 due to the urban renewal programme.[36] By 1970, there were more than 12,000 flats in the estate, housing 45,066 tenants, an increase of 25,000 residents over figures from 1957 (Arumainathan 1973: 238).

The emergency flats, as a re-housing expedient, had accomplished their goal: to shatter the vicious cycle of proliferating unauthorised wooden housing, the migration of low-income Chinese families into the urban periphery and the repeated outbreak of *kampong* infernos. They also remained deeply unpopular with even the low-income families. Numerous fire victims allocated one-room emergency flats in Bukit Ho Swee soon requested bigger flats.[37] The HDB quickly realised that 'the general opinion of the public is that there is no marked improvement from moving out of a one-room cubicle in the slum area to a one-room Housing Board unit other than cleanliness'.[38] In 1966, the government

decided to build less one-room emergency units and to restrict them to areas further away from the Central Area.[39] By this time, modern HDB estates had steadily replaced the *kampongs* in Singapore. By 1965, the Board had built 54,430 housing units, compared to only about 500 wooden dwellings being built at that time (Singapore 1965: 33-34). In the new urban periphery within a five-mile radius of the Central Area stood more than 50,000 units of public housing, accommodating 430,000 people or 23% of the population, and rising. The social and political margin, which the British colonial regime had sought to erase had been restored by the PAP government in the form of high-modernist public housing. The result was a marked reduction in the autonomy of families, which hitherto had had the freedom to move and sublet, rent, build or rebuild their accommodations on their own terms. The loss of this individual autonomy was the social price paid for citizenship, as the families were moved from spontaneous, unauthorised wooden housing into public housing in the 1960s. By becoming, first, tenants and, subsequently, owners of HDB housing, these families were progressively transformed into citizens of the emergent nation-state.

The Undying Rumours

In the final analysis, however, the success of the PAP's fire emergency re-housing also came at a social and political price. What happened in the aftermath of the *kampong* fires left a lasting imprint on the collective social memory of Singapore up to the present. As development projects increasingly encroached onto areas of unauthorised wooden housing in the 1950s, *kampong* dwellers commonly considered fire as an act of arson committed by hostile landlords, the government, hired secret society hands, or, simply, a spiteful neighbour. 'It was always like that', they ventured even years later, 'There was eviction and people did not want to move. After a while, fire broke out' (Interview with Chong 13 February 2007). One *kampong* dweller claimed to have 'seen a piece of cloth tied up with a metal wire and thrown onto the *attap'* (Interview with Goh 24 May 2007), while another 'knew a friend who belonged to this type of gang, they would set fire to *attap* houses because when the landowner bought the land, there were people who refused to be evicted, so they played dirty tricks' (Interview with Ang 30 June 2007). In the logic of arson, fire was always accompanied by suspicious circumstances: the scale of destruction, in marked contrast to the minimum loss of lives, appeared to establish the existence of a well-crafted plan, that 'whenever there was resettlement, there was arson and no one got hurt' (Interview with Chin 21 November 2006).

The enormity of the 1961 Bukit Ho Swee fire and the speed of the emergency re-housing intensified such beliefs. The inferno was reported to have started at a wooden house, no. 174-A, in *Kampong* Tiong Bahru. The *Nanyang Siang Pau* carried interviews with fire victims claiming to be residents in the vicinity who recounted how 'the fire was caused not by heaven but by scoundrels more evil than wild beasts' (28 May 1961). A middle-aged man apparently saw two men throwing burning torches onto the roof of 174-A before fleeing (Ibid.), while an elderly man, relating how his neighbour had also witnessed the same thing, lamented that 'some heartless person(s) started the fire!' (*NYSP* 26 May 1961). In June, the *Nanyang Siang Pau* reported that the police had questioned more than ten self-proclaimed witnesses of the alleged act of arson, which, the newspaper remarked, was sufficient reason to believe it was arson, with only the concrete evidence was lacking (10 June 1961). Subsequent reports of arson at *Kampong* Henderson in late May and early June fanned the flames, leading the *Sin Chew Jit Poh* to conclude that 'there is every possibility that the recent biggest fire was [also] caused by some wicked elements' (14 June 1961). On 9 June, the police detained a suspect but released him due to a lack of evidence (*NYSP* 28 May 1961). A fortnight later, two attempts of arson were reported on wooden housing at Carey Road, which had survived the Bukit Ho Swee fire (*ST* 14 Jul 1961).

Given its prominent role in *kampong* clearance and the wariness with which wooden house dwellers had previously viewed the state, the PAP government was strongly implicated in the rumours of arson following the Bukit Ho Swee inferno. PAP leaders tried to suppress the speculation as baseless and contradictory and attributed it to malicious 'outsiders', 'opportunists' and 'agitators' (NAS 1961). However, these official strategies were not completely successful, which was indicative of how 'there was nothing more powerful ... than those exchanges of words between neighbours' (Farge 1993: 13). The rumours possessed an inner logic that could not readily be disproved and which linked the local circumstances both before and after the fire to part of a powerful web of conspiracy, a theory seemingly supported by evidence and history. The rumours also reinforced the psychology of calamity among the fire victims, explaining how families were rendered homeless in an instant. In the absence of a convincing official report on the cause of the Bukit Ho Swee inferno, the rumours were entirely consistent with the world-view and everyday experience of former *kampong* dwellers.

Many fire victims thought that one major indication that was arson was that the Bukit Ho Swee fire occurred on a public holiday. This meant that the *kampong* children were not at school, but the men were fortunately at home to take care of their families and consequently only four lives were lost (Interview with Mok 8 January 2007). Moreover, the

fire managed to jump two roads and was seen burning in different places at the same time. It was not possible, some people reasoned, even with the strong wind, that the flames would roll down a hill to leapfrog a three-storey shop-house, leave it untouched and then cross the main road. This 'curious' path of destruction suggested that a plane, visible from the air that day, had set a series of blazes (Interviews with Soh 10 September 2007; Low 25 April 2007). The government's culpability, it was argued, was also established by its execution of a coherent plan of rebuilding and re-housing, which was evidenced in how quickly the fire site was redeveloped, while the victims were promptly re-housed in the completed flats at the Tiong Bahru fire site and the partially completed flats at the cemetery site (Interviews with Wee 27 April 2007; Lee 31 December 2006; Ong Bin 26 June 2007).

In March 1963, when two thousand people were rendered homeless by a massive fire at Bukit Ban Kee, most of them were swiftly re-housed in the emergency flats of nearby Bukit Ho Swee. What supposedly happened here in 1961 had by then become part of Singapore's collective memory. A fire victim observed that 'it was just like the Bukit Ho Swee fire. There were many rumours but there was no evidence' (Interview with Lim Kok Peng 16 May 2005). The opposition party in the Legislative Assembly, the Barisan Sosialis, declared that '[w]henever a fire breaks out in any part of Singapore, the Minister will go there and grab the land for the building of houses' (*SLAD* 10 December 1963: 251). A subsequent fire at Pulau Minyak in November 1964 destroyed the homes of 1,657 people, who were allocated HDB flats 'barely 26 hours after the fire had broken out' (Social Welfare Department 1964: 35). The Barisan party were convinced that the fire had been 'arranged by the PAP' (*SLAD* 17 November 1964: 639).

Such rumours of arson have left an indelible imprint on the relationship between the government and the population over whom they have ruled since 1959. On the surface, the PAP's political control is nothing short of hegemonic. The party has never lost more than four parliamentary seats in an election since 1963 or seen its popular vote fall under 61%. This hegemony is not simply numerical but also ideological: the citizenry largely accept the official line that the near-universal provision of public housing has served their material interests (Chua 1997: 132). This political dominance, however, has not created an 'effective' relationship between the PAP and the citizenry (Lim 1994). On the contrary, the relationship has been based on a pragmatic exchange of goods – votes for the government, and material rewards, including the ability to own a modern flat, for the people. In addition, the government's management of spaces in contemporary Singapore has met with a mixture of 'collusion, conflict, and collision' with the citizenry, which has protested against policies considered to be inimical to individual or

community interests (Kong and Yeoh 2003, 11). There is also wide-spread nostalgia for the 'good old *kampong* days' among the elderly people, which may be interpreted as 'an intrinsic critique of the present by the ordinary people' – of the more regulated and stressful lifestyle of present-day Singapore – and which belies a desire for 'recovering control over daily life within the present zone of material comfort' (Chua 1997: 162, 166). In short, what Singaporeans want both for themselves and from their government are deeply conflicting things.

When Lim Kim San passed away in July 2006, the occasion precipitated critical emotional responses on Internet discussion forums, particularly from elderly Singaporeans who remember the days when Lim presided over the *kampong* clearance campaign. The perceived anonymity provided by the Internet has emboldened Singaporeans to candidly comment on sensitive topics, which would not have materialised in a public forum (Rodan 1998: 75). In the popular *Sammyboy.com's Alfresco Coffee Shop*, a hotbed of anti-PAP discussions, the historical association between fires and *kampong* clearance was vividly recalled following Lim's death. One forum poster named 'e_visionary' asked rhetorically, 'How many *kampongs* were burned due to one man?', to which ÎÚÅ replied, 'Yes, I heard stories about "government people" "purplely" [purposely] burn down *kampongs* to make way for new flats when all negotiations failed' (SB 2006).

It is not only the elderly who are interested in *Kampong* Bukit Ho Swee and the great 1961 fire, which destroyed it. A general revival of interest in the country's history has led Singaporeans one or two generations younger to ask critical questions about the untold past. Prior to Lim Kim San's death, the pilot episode of a Malay-language documentary series boldly posed the question, 'What caused the fire?' The programme featured interviews with a former resident, a fire fighter, a fire department officer, a senior civil servant, a sociologist, and a history researcher (myself), none of whom supported the arson theory. While this refusal to publicly confirm the rumours highlights the sensitivity of the topic despite the intervening years; it is indicative of the mindset of younger Singaporeans who pose these kinds of questions, which impinge directly on the history of modern Singapore. The episode concluded, in striking postmodernist fashion, 'There are various versions of history. It is up to you to make your own conclusions' (Oak3 films 2006).

Conclusion

Modern Singapore was born out of fire, and the *kampong* infernos that lit up this period of history hold an ambivalent place in contemporary

society. As historical events, the fires belong to the past but they remain in the present as personal and social memory. The conflagrations and the emergency public housing projects, which followed in their wake helped to create the disciplined, contemporary nation-state, but they also remain an integral part of present-day critiques of the PAP government and the high-modernist philosophy of development which it has robustly implemented. The uncertainty with which the citizenry regard both the government and the forms and consequences of the high modernity is indicative of the scale and pace of the social and economic transformation, directed from above, which took place during the birth of modern Singapore.

Notes

1   See Curriculum Planning & Development Division, Ministry of Education, *Singapore: From Settlement to Nation, Pre-1819 to 1971* (Singapore: EPB Pan Pacific, 2007), p. 207; the Singapore History Gallery at the National Museum of Singapore at Stamford Road; the Civil Defence Heritage Gallery at Hill Street; and the HDB Gallery at Toa Payoh.

2   SIT 475/47, Notes for Discussion on Housing by Commissioner of Lands, 13 Jun 1947. 'C3' was a rating in the British classification of medical fitness for military service during World War One and referred to someone unfit for combat duty. The term was subsequently extended to populations and nations.

3   A4231/1949/Singapore, Despatch from Australian Commissioner for Malaya to Secretary, Department of External Affairs, 16 Mar 1949.

4   SIT 475/47, Notes for Discussion on Housing by Commissioner of Lands, 13 Jun 1947.

5   PRO CO 1030/1597, Memo titled 'Public Housing in Singapore' by the UK Commission, 16 April 1963.

6   SIT 183/52, Letter from Aung Peang and Teo Ah Beh to Lands Manager, SIT, 8 Oct. 1954.

7   HB 364/58, Memo from Lands Inspector to Acting Lands Officer, 28 May 1958.

8   HB 659/53, Report on the Demolition of Three Timber and Attap Houses on Singapore Improvement Trust Land at Lorong 27, Geylang, on 17 July 1953 by Acting Lands Manager, 22 July 1953.

9   RG 59, 746F.00/9-1561, Despatch from US Consul General to Department of State titled, 'Left-Wingers in Rural Areas Desert the PAP', 15 Sept. 1961.

10 HB 477/53, Supplementary report to report titled 'Housing' by the Planning Coordination Committee, n.d.

11 SIT 952/50, Notes of Meeting of Chairman, SIT, Commissioner of Lands, Manager, SIT, and George Pepler on 9 Jan 1951; SIT 617/54, Memo titled 'Housing Programmes and Policy' by Chief Architect, SIT, and Planning Adviser, SIT, 5 July 1954.

12 SIT 808/50, Memo from Superintendent, SFB, to Manager, SIT, 27 Oct. 1954.

13 SIT 808/2/50, Memo from 2nd Assistant Secretary, SIT, to Secretary, SIT, 25 July 1953; and Minutes of Trust Meeting, 17 June 1953.

14 SIT 638/53, Memo from Architect, SIT, to Chief Architect, SIT, 1 April 1957.

15 HB 477/53, Revised Building Programme no. 7, 15 Feb 1954.

16 SIT 813/55, Letter from Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Local Government, Lands and Housing, to Chairman, Kampong Tiong Bahru Fire Relief Fund Committee, 3 Nov. 1955.

17 HB 477/53, Report titled 'Housing' by the Planning Coordination Committee, n.d.

18 HB 477/53, Supplementary report to report titled 'Housing' by the Planning Coordination Committee, undated.
19 HB 25/59 vol. I, Memo titled 'Tiong Bahru Fire' by the Acting Manager, SIT, 16 Feb. 1959.
20 HB 25/59 vol. I, Minutes of Trust Meeting, 10 March 1959.
21 HB 25/59 vol. I, Memo from Acting Manager, SIT, to Chairman, SIT, 24 March 1959.
22 HB 1045/53, Memo from Lands Manager, HDB, 10 Aug. 1960; HB 1001/52 vol. III, Memo from Acting Manager, SIT, to Deputy Secretary, SIT, 6 April. 1959.
23 SIT 842/2/52, Memo from Senior Planner, Planning Division, SIT, to Chief Planner, Planning Control, SIT, 5 Oct. 1956.
24 HB 16/59, Notes of a Meeting of Officers to Consider Housing Policy, 16 Jan. 1959.
25 HB 25/16/59, Memo from CEO, HDB, to Permanent Secretary, MND, 30 Dec. 1960.
26 HB 25/59 vol. II, Memo from CEO, HDB, to Permanent Secretary, MND, 19 April 1961.
27 HB 871/57, Memo from CEO, HDB, to Members of the Board, 10 Oct. 1960.
28 HB 16/59 vol. I, Memo from CEO, HDB, to Chief Architect, HDB, 28 Nov. 1960; Memo from Permanent Secretary, MND, to CEO, HDB, 23 Nov 1960; and Notes of a Meeting at the MND, 6 Oct. 1960.
29 HB 99/48 vol. II, Report of the Building Department, May 1961.
30 HB 16/59 vol. I, Memo from Chairman, HDB, to Minister of Finance, 20 Oct. 1961.
31 HB 147/51 Vol. V, Statement of Rehousing Scheme by Estates Department, Dec. 1963.
32 HB 141/52, Memo from CEO, HDB, to Permanent Secretary, MND, 11 Aug. 1964.
33 HB 1013/50 vol. I, Memo from Chief Architect, HDB, to CEO, HDB, 4 Dec. 1963.
34 HB 178/59 vol. II, Minutes of Allocations Committee Meeting on 27 Sept. 1962.
35 HB 178/59 vol. II, Minutes of Allocations Committee Meeting on 2 July 1963.
36 HB 178/59 vol. III, Minutes of Allocations Committee Meeting on 7 Oct. 1964.
37 HB 871/57, Memo from Estates Manager, HDB, to Chief Architect, HDB, 14 April 1962.
38 HB 16/59 vol. II, Memo from Estates Manager, HDB, to Secretary, HDB, 5 June 1962.
39 HB 871/57, Memo from Permanent Secretary, MND, to CEO, HDB, 29 Aug. 1966.

6 Gender and Discipline in 'The Singapore Story': The Female Chinese Factory Workers in Perspective, c. 1980-c. 1990

Ernest Koh

Introduction

In his conclusion to *Rickshaw Coolie*, James Warren underscores the intention of his book, which is to 'bring back to Singapore's own Chinese people and society, a *singkeh* coolie culture and history, which is, finally, their own – a People's History (Warren 1986, 326).' In the two decades since the publication of *Rickshaw Coolie*, Warren's intentions have been echoed in a comparatively small but growing body of literature on Singapore's history. But what is People's History? What do such histories offer to the readers in the present especially with regard to past and existing trends in the practice of writing about Singapore past?

People's History is a historical approach that attempts to solicit an understanding of the past through the perspective of common people and the practices of everyday life (Samuel 1981, xvi). Shifting the epicentre of analyses from the leaders and key personalities of history to that of the common people, it recreates the worlds that lie between worlds – the world of 'Private Wheeler' juxtaposed against the world of the Duke of Wellington or the world of Napoleonic Europe and Georgian England. Historians who adopt People's History as an approach to analysis apply it to a broad range of 'types' of history, such as military history, political history, or economic history. The historian takes history from the privileged classes – the kings, sultans, and literati – and returns it to those who were part of history, but silent. People's History can thus be thought of as 'history from below', studies along the lines of E.P. Thompson's 'poor bloody infantry' of the Industrial Revolution (Tarling 2000: 84-85). It solicits the past through the historical experience of the everyday individual, based on the assumption that s/he is an active participant in historical production as both actor and narrator. Hence, the historian gives her or him the responsibility of a 'maker' and 'keeper' of history.

Yet the 'history from below' does not entail a whitewash of existing historiography. People's Histories are strongest when they locate and in-

tegrate themselves within existing 'mainstream' history, fleshing out
and completing the picture of the past to enhance the rigour and value
of analyses. That being said, at key junctures, we should expect that
People's History to contradict the 'mainstream' narrative. The value in
uncovering such schisms is inestimable, as these are the heart of intel-
lectual inquiries and the soul of the 'history from below'.

The writing of Singaporean People's Histories continues to occupy a
minor niche within the body of literature on Singaporean history in
general. Whilst the appearance of James Warren's *Rickshaw Coolie*
(1986) is widely recognised as the landmark beginning for formal stu-
dies on People's Histories of Singapore, a number of studies that pre-
date Warren's work attempt to recover the island's 'history from below'.
Yen Ching-Hwang's article in the *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* on
early Chinese clan organisations in Singapore and Malaya (1981), the
same author's subsequent monograph on the social history of the Chi-
nese in Singapore and Malaya (1986), Lai Ah Eng's *Peasants, Proletar-
ians, and Prostitutes* (1986), as well as Lee Poh Ping's *Chinese Society in
Nineteenth Century Singapore* (1978) are a selection of early efforts that
diverged from the broader historiographical tendencies to focus on Sin-
gapore's 'otherside'.

People's history as an approach to reconstructing Singapore's history
has ensnared the imagination of a group of historians of Singapore.
Juergen Rudolph's (1998) efforts have resulted in a splendid but often-
overlooked historical ethnography of ordinary *peranakan* in Singapore,
while Stephen Dobbs (2003) pursued a People's History of the lighter-
men who lived, worked, and died on the Singapore River. Loh Kah Seng
is a prolific writer in the field of Singaporean People's Histories, with
articles on urban *kampongs* (2007) and the Singaporean Great Depres-
sion (2006), to name but a few of his contributions in this area.

Peter Rimmer and Lisa Allen's edited volume *The Underside of Malay-
sian History* (1990) is noteworthy in the area for its contributors' efforts
in illuminating Singapore's history 'from below', while the Singapore
National Archives has also made significant contributions to the popu-
lar illumination of the people's past, among which *Kampong Days*
(1993), a pictorial return to the life and times of Singapore's rural past,
is especially important. Henry Frei's *Guns of February* (2004) explored
the experiences of Malaya during the Second World War from the per-
spective of ordinary Japanese soldiers, while Paul Kratoska's research
resulted in a social history of the Japanese occupation of Malaya (1998).

Towards a People's History of the Factory Workers of Singapore

The beginnings of my interest in the factory workers of Singapore can be traced to my doctoral research on the historical links between literacy and class among the Chinese of Singapore. On the one hand, the factory workers were a community that I 'stumbled upon' as I began to map the patterns of socio-economic stratification in Singaporean society. Yet, in hindsight, it was perhaps inevitable that I would encounter the silent story of the factory workers during any interrogation of Singapore's development 'from below', given the Singaporean economy's dependence on manufacturing and the fact that the industry was responsible for the creation of so many jobs for otherwise unskilled or semi-skilled workers.

Here, I request permission to pause and pre-empt a question that I have been presented with in several conversations with colleagues: why *Chinese* workers? Why not, for instance, ethnic Malay workers who had a significant presence in the factories of Singapore as assemblers and operators? My common response to these intriguing queries is that the historical experience of each distinct community is sufficiently different due to a plethora of external and internal factors, so much so that they warrant separate studies in the future. Except perhaps in a broad survey of the topic, to consider the lived experiences of all of the factory workers in Singapore as being essentially the same, given how ethnicity has been shown to be an enormous factor in shaping how daily life unfolds, is highly problematic.

My research into Chinese factory workers resulted in a paper published in *Tonan Ajia Kenkyu* (Koh, 2007). It was a people's history of non-English-literate workers and the impact on their lives that broader changes to the city-state during the 1980s were bringing about. However, one question stayed with me during the preparation of that paper and ever since: where was gender and discipline in this phase of 'The Singapore Story'? The idea of the disciplined workforce brought about by the People's Action Party's (PAP) policies in the name of economic growth, is not a new one. Christopher Tremewan's monograph (1994) on the island's political economy is persuasive on a number of levels, but, nevertheless, I remain only partially convinced. It is true that the workers were subject to intense disciplining efforts by the state, but as this paper will demonstrate, the workers also found ways to challenge the disciplining process, as well as disciplining themselves. Both of these salient points are critical in our understanding of Singapore's history: that the common person was not just a malleable and faceless mass, completely subservient to hegemonic forces without any aspirations and strategies of his or her own. There is a balance to be found

between structure and agency, and leaning too far either way can lead to historical myopia.

There was a significant component on gender in my earlier paper, where I looked at how it shaped the experiences of life in Singapore's factories. However, it was not the main focus and I have always felt that a more substantial story of gender in the factories awaited further scrutiny and illumination. The women were not just part of the pool of factory workers because as the 1980s progressed we saw more and more of them rise to positions as assemblers, operators and machinists. We witnessed a dramatic change in the demographics of the factory floor, where women went from being a minority, to being deliberately selected to fill these positions and hence became the dominant feature of production work in Singapore.

Their experience was not unique: male factory workers experienced some of the same forms of discipline that we shall encounter in this paper, such as the discipline a worker faces via an ideology of productivity and collectivism as well as the 'disciplining gaze'. However, men were not, for instance, disciplined using the language of patriarchy, and the disciplining of women carries with it sufficiently unique themes to necessitate a separate examination.

Gender and Discipline in the Patriarchal Factory

One of the distinctive features of Singapore's society during the 1980s was the growing presence of women in the workforce. By the early 1970s, Singapore's economy was characterised by full employment, averaging less than one per cent unemployment, and by the latter part of the decade, it was clear to PAP policymakers that growth could not be sustained without introducing strategies to cope with labour shortages (Lee 1992: 40-41). A key component in those strategies was to draw more women into the workforce. While women have had a long history of various forms of participation in Singapore's economy, it has only been since the early 1980s that statistical trends began to display more obvious trends in the representation of women in formal waged work. The labour force participation rate among women in Singapore stood at 44.3 per cent in 1980, two per cent higher than the year before, and increasing to over 50.3 per cent by 1990 (Wong 1992: 163).

The increasing number of women in the workforce in general corresponded to what was taking place in the factories. With the rising cost of living, more and more women were joining the workforce in an effort to meet the needs and aspirations of everyday life. The *Labour Force Survey* of 1975 indicates that there were nearly 75,000 Chinese women in production-related occupations (cited in Salaff 1988: 15). In 1980,

this figure had risen to 90,086 (Khoo 1981c: 66); a decade later, this figure had nearly doubled to 161,381 (Lau 1993c: 105). To get a better sense of how rapid this growth was, in 1990, there was an increase of over 23,600 women in Singapore's workforce over the year before, with an overwhelming majority entering the workplace as production operators (*Yearbook 1990*: 55-58).

Numerous studies across disciplines have demonstrated that in contemporary developing countries this increase in female participation rates is fairly common looking at broader employment trends, particularly among the lower socio-economic strata of societies. This trend continues in communities in the People's Republic of China, the Philippines, Indonesia, and India. As Janet Salaff argues:

> In their search for cheap labor for the manufacture of electronic devices, textiles, and garments, the new export industries in the Pacific Rim draw on women. Firms impose ceilings of pay and promotion and encourage high turnover among women workers to keep wages low. The family roles of Chinese women shape them to be a prime source of labor for such jobs (Salaff 1988: 7).

Chinese society in Singapore has historically been organised along patriarchal lines, and it is not surprising to find that the male and female domains within the factory were often clearly delineated along lines of power and authority. But how were gender relations and gender roles in the workplace applied to the factories? How much 'discipline' did the males mete out on females and how did this process unfold on a day-to-day basis?

At a hard disk assembly site at Industrial Park Two in Ang Mo Kio, the supervisory positions were occupied exclusively by males, as were the upper management positions. The production lines were staffed almost entirely by females, with only a handful of males among a group of some 200 workers. This distribution pattern of gender in the factories resonates with Linda Lim's findings in her study of female labour in electronics factories in Malaysia and Singapore. Lim reported that over 90 per cent of all factory workers in the electronics factories surveyed were female, while males dominated supervisory and management positions almost to the point of exclusiveness (Lim 1978: 2-3). Between the two occupational classes we find the Quality Control (QC) operators, who were a consistent presence across much of the manufacturing industry. These were production workers who were better educated – in this case, having completed or at least received some secondary education – than the other workers and, as was the case of the factory in Industrial Park Two, they were sometimes asked to take up the last physical position on the line. This allowed the QC operator to moni-

tor the level of the finished product as it was being put together. To alle-
viate the line supervisor's workload, the QC operators were empowered
to accept or reject particular components that were coming down the
line. Poor soldering or even the lack of an appropriate time stamp on a
line of items were just some of the grounds for rejecting a series of disk
drives at Ang Mo Kio (interview conducted by author).

QC operators were usually male, a reflection of the noticeable demo-
graphic trends in the Singapore education system during the 1980s. In
general, although this was a trend that was already beginning to wane,
males still tended to rise to a higher level in the education system when
compared to females (Khoo 1981c: 77-79; and Lau 1993c; 105-106). This
was particularly when household heads had to make choices between
living expenses and their children's individual educations. Lok Kwee, for
instance, dropped out of the education system completely at the mid-pri-
mary level to alleviate the more pressing financial needs of her house-
hold; but it was not because of the cost of schooling itself. Under then
Deputy Prime Minister Goh Keng Swee's advice, the PAP government
had made reducing the level of the 'educational waste' among the lower
socio-economic classes of Singapore's society a priority, and allocated a
significant portion of the national budget to promote educational subsi-
dies (see Goh 1979). However, for many like Lok Kwee it was the time
spent at school that was costly, which was better used by earning money
to help pay for household expenses (interview of Lok Kwee , 1/12/2005).

More often than not it was therefore the male who was empowered
to establish the framework of the women's work experiences. How pro-
ductive a female worker was, the quality of the work that she was re-
sponsible for, and how fast she was working or ought to be working
was determined by this very male domain. The fact that it was common
practice for male supervisors to call the women under their charge
'girls' was just another manifestation of the patriarchal nature of the
production floor.

The language of patriarchy and paternalism was used by male author-
ity figures to establish and reinforce a gendered hierarchy within the
factory world. Female workers were constantly being reminded of their
status and positions within the factory, which was more often than not
subservient to their male counterparts. At Ang Mo Kio Industrial Park
Two, one worker remembered how even the older women were referred
to as 'girls' by her line supervisor (interview, 17/11/2004). At a transfor-
mer manufacturing plant on Kian Teck Lane, another operator revealed
that the male shift manager made it a point to boast to upper manage-
ment about how he had managed to motivate 'his girls' to higher levels
of productivity. Conversely, I have yet to come across any instance of
males in factories, regardless of their occupational status, being referred
to as 'boys'.

Women were publicly labelled according to their perceived abilities by attaching an adjective to the noun 'girl'. A worker deemed unproductive was referred to as a 'lazy girl, while the hardworking ones were labelled 'good girls'. The youngest female workers were referred to as 'little girls'. A larger worker was called a 'big girl', and the older workers were sometimes referred to as 'old girl' (interview, 13/1/2005). In some cases, a beauty pageant (a popular social events of 1980s Singapore) among the female workers would be organised by male supervisors, ostensibly to 'raise morale' by 'having some time for fun at work', with the winner being flattered and teased and called 'pretty girl' for months thereafter (interview, 17/11/2004).

The expectations of female workers in a world where males dominated supervisory positions were thus defined by what can be understood as 'the patriarchal factory'. Female operators were often expected to make mistakes simply because they were female. Teo Bee Hua remembered how, months into her job at Ang Mo Kio, she had accidentally wired an entire batch of hard disks incorrectly when she was ill, upon which the QC operator reportedly remarked, 'the government wants us to be productive. How can we be productive when we have to rely on women?' (interview, 17/11/2004) Female workers were expected to display acquiescence to the strict hierarchy within the factory, and this often meant biting one's tongue when faced with sexist remarks such as these. 'People can make things very difficult for you if they want to,' Ai Lek reflected, 'sometimes it's better to just let them think that they are better (interview, 6/12/2004).' Thus disciplining oneself in the gendered workplace was often the path of least resistance.

Discussions on the nature of patriarchy from theorists of sociology and organisational behaviour point to the institutionalisation of subordination and dominance along patriarchal lines at work as being commonplace in capital economies. Hemming (1987), for instance, argues that patriarchy in the workplace can be described as a form of 'paternalistic law', and the application of this authority on other (especially female) individuals is legitimised on the recognition of male authority, and is especially prevalent in male-dominated cultures. These theoretical models do not presume that women are completely powerless, as Lerner (1986) points out. Instead, there is a voluntary acceptance of patriarchy in exchange for economic protection (i.e., keeping one's job). The patronising and paternalistic languages of everyday life used to discipline and remind the women of their status in relation to their male superiors, as well as the acceptance – even normalising – of such practices are striking cases-in-point.

Lim's research into the hiring practices of electronics manufacturing firms also reveals another form of disciplining in the patriarchal factory. Her study found that women were specifically targeted in employment

drives because women were considered 'passive, [and] co-operative ... the greater docility of female workers makes them easier to organize and more productive workers' by the management of multinational corporations (Lim 1978: 13-14).' On the other hand, men, especially younger men, were considered impatient and egotistical, and had problems taking orders from superiors. For the firms, there was a prevailing belief that males were more likely to cause workplace disruptions through insubordination, a critical factor that underscores the PAP's intentions in creating, in Tremewan's parlance, a 'docile and disciplined workforce (Tremewan 1994: 50).'

What about opportunities to break out of their prescribed roles in the factory? To test if patriarchy in the factory was indeed rigid and all encompassing, one has to look at the women's ability to being promoted to higher positions in the factory. The prospects for advancement were slim, although it was not entirely unusual for a woman to be promoted to a QC operator, or even a line supervisor. However, understanding the reality of actually being able to take such opportunities requires some appreciation of gender roles in Singapore's Chinese society. Much has been written about the role of women and the shifting nature of the work-family balance that industrialisation has brought upon adult females in Singapore, and so only a brief outline of the issues will be presented here.

Whilst labour participation amongst women in Singapore has increased at a steady rate, particularly in the 1980s, as noted earlier, the roles and responsibilities of women in the family did not dramatically change. With households in Singapore being increasingly drawn into the money economy, the earning power of a dual-income household became an attractive proposition. As the city-state became increasingly industrialised, goods and services that one could barter for as a housewife in a pre-industrial society now required cash. Homes metamorphosed from a simple *kampong* shack to high-rise flats that necessitated a disciplined financial regime if one was to make one's bank payments or pay the rent. The factories merged with the urban residential landscape looked like flattened housing projects. Meanwhile, huge industrial parks were located in the middle of working-class neighbourhoods like Toa Payoh, Jurong, Ubi, and Ang Mo Kio. The logic of the urban planners was simple: to draw working-class women into the factories, where they could help fuel an economy that was desperately short on labour and at the same time improve their own financial situations. As Singapore's entire society began to change, the citizenry found itself on the cusps of two historical epochs, between the old Singapore and the new. Approaches to social organisation, gender roles, and gender relations needed to change, although more often than not, change was only partial and conditional (Salaff 1988: 235-236).

Within the Chinese household, women remained the primary care-givers and housekeepers. In more affluent households, women were able to pass some (or all) of these duties onto housekeepers or live-in foreign domestic workers. In poorer households, these spheres of responsibility could not be 'outsourced' as readily. Working-class women were thus the most likely to become what Pauline Tay-Straughan calls the 'supermum' – a woman running a household who was also expected to prove her economic worth to her family by getting a paid job, while continuing to be responsible for almost all of the domestic responsibilities, such as the preparation of meals and the day-to-day child-rearing (Tay-Straughan 1999: 9-11).

Therefore, it was common for female factory workers to negotiate the delicate balance of waged work and domestic responsibilities by making practical and disciplined choices in their employment. Factories that were located near one's residence were an obvious advantage, as it cut down on travel time and maximised what could be accomplished in a day, at home as well as in the workplace (interview, 1/12/2005). Losing one's job was problematic in this regard because there were many job opportunities in factories across the island, but it was the neighbour-hood factory that was the most desirable, and thus women were often obedient in order to keep their jobs at their 'ideal' place of employment (interview, 19/11/2004). Being able to accept work shifts that comple-mented their husbands' work schedules and school hours was also an important factor. Many of those interviewed as part of this project, ex-pressed the common goal of having 'one adult at home', although achieving it remained problematic (Interview, 6/12/2004).

As a result of these two everyday considerations, a promotions to bet-ter-paid positions arose that required more responsibility and time in the factory were usually turned down by women employees. 'We are not looking for a career,' stated one worker bluntly, 'the money is im-portant, but we need time just as much ((interview, 13/1/2005).'

An equally pointed statement was made by Chua Kai Lin. 'A promo-tion doesn't come with respect. All of the other [male] supervisors will gang up on you, and give you the worst tasks. Better to stay where you stand (interview with Chua Kai Lin, 19/11/2004).' These type of self-dis-ciplining sentiments along gender lines which reach the point where a female worker makes a conscious choice to remain in a subservient po-sition, echo Salaff's findings of working-class Chinese families in Singa-pore during the 1970s and early 1980s:

> We can usefully compare the reasons that women do not reach
> their occupational potential with those that men give for refusing
> promotions. Poor women ... have neither the education to study
> new techniques nor the confidence to try. They are reluctant to

handle English-language forms and reporting duties ... some wo-
men prefer to augment their incomes by moonlighting. There
are also women who turn down an offer of advancement in fa-
vour of staying with their peers. They fear that they will be re-
jected by younger and better-educated colleagues ... in the new
and more responsible post ... all women must maintain the fa-
mily domestically as well. A women's family burden is a power-
ful reason to refuse a promotion (Salaff 1988: 235).

Discipline Through Work Spaces

The need for a docile and disciplined workforce has been a fundamen-
tal notion of the PAP's planners since the party came to power in 1959.
The disempowerment and deregistration of 'left-wing' trade unions that
began in 1963 left little organised opposition to the creation of disci-
plined work spaces. During the period 1963-1964, work stoppages de-
clined by over 90 per cent due to measures taken by the PAP govern-
ment. The PAP's efforts were so successful that there were no work
stoppages at all during the 1978-1985 period, and only one in 1986 (Bel-
lo and Rosenfield 1990: 304; Deyo 1989: 62).
     The creation of an 'industrially peaceful landscape' was the centre-
piece of the PAP's export-oriented industrialisation strategy. To convince
foreign multinational corporations (MNCs) to set up their production
operations in Singapore, the state needed to identify key advantages
over other potential production sites in the region, such as those in
South Korea, Taiwan, Malaysia, and Indonesia. What Singapore offered
was a stable and transparent bureaucratic process, high productivity,
and complete mastery over any attempt to organise the labour force into
a collective force that could not be handled by the government (Milne
and Mauzy 2002: 31). The National Wages Council (NWC) was estab-
lished in 1972 to provide a legitimate channel through which the state
could control the salaries of the lower working class in the private sec-
tor, which was related to regional trends to ensure that the labour costs
for MNCs were no higher than in comparable production sites in Asia.
     The NWC itself was not a legislative body, but it was designed to re-
place lengthy bargaining processes between capital-owners and union-
ised labour that could lead to industrial stoppages. The council was
composed of ten union leaders (affiliated directly with the state-spon-
sored National Trades Union Congress, or the NTUC), ten government
officials, and ten heads of business associations who advised the state
and the private sector on appropriate wage structures to adopt, and re-
commended salary adjustments as necessary 'to promote productivity
and efficiency ... in the public interest' (*Labour Rights Report* 2003: 10-

11). Bello and Rosenfield further note that the 1968 Employment Act and the amendment to the Industrial Relations Act that same year gave 'management full discretionary power over most aspects of labour relations, including dismissals, promotions and transfers' (Tremewan 1994: 33). The end result was that wage levels among the factory workers were kept deliberately low upon the recommendations of the NWC to attract foreign investors with their winning formula, which was basically a disciplined, low-wage workforce (Rodan 1989: 144-146).

These initiatives have been well documented by political economists like Rodan and Tremewan, and a complete review of their analysis would be incongruous here. What this chapter is concerned with is the process of discipline and control that occurred within the factory, and less with the more abstract implications of legislative disempowerment. What did the broader processes that were aimed at disciplining the workforce mean on a day-to-day basis for the female factory workers? How obvious were these processes once they were translated into the everyday experience of the workplace? Were they at some level 'aware' that they were the subjects of discipline and control, and if so what did they think of it?

The most visible disciplinary strategy used on the workforce was the requirement to wear uniforms. This is nothing new and not exclusive to Singapore, of course; since the Industrial Revolution, factory workers around the world have worn uniforms, and a common and acceptable explanation (from the owners' perspective) is that it fosters a sense of having a collective stake in the performance of the working community. Lok Kwee works the 7:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. shift at a leads and interconnectors factory on International Road. Her uniform consisted of a light-blue blouse and matching slacks. A light-blue belt ensured that the slacks did not compromise one's modesty, and employees were specifically warned not to wear a non-regulation belt:

> The security guards check us as we report to work. If the guards miss us, then the QC operators would probably report us for having improper uniform. They (the management) took it very seriously (interview with Lok Kwee, 1/12/2005).

The first set of uniforms was provided free, but if a uniform became severely stained (the uniforms needed to be clean at the start of each work shift), torn or lost then the worker had to pay for a replacement out of her own pocket. At the factory where Lok Kwee worked, a full uniform costs approximately thirty Singapore dollars. Considering that female wages in 1980 averaged between $200 to $400 per month (Khoo 1981d: 64), rising to $600 to $750 by 1990 (Lau 1993d: 111), the uniform of a factory worker was often treated with inordinate care by its wearer (interview with Lok Kwee, 1/12/2005).

At the factory on Kian Teck Lane, Sarah Chew was told to wear a pair of safety overalls over a brown, half-sleeved blouse, a long skirt, and brown rubber-soled canvas shoes. The distance between the skirt hem and the knee, she was told on her first day, was not permitted to be less than the width of a man's palm. A QC operator or line supervisor might pull individuals with suspicious-looking skirts aside for an inspection. Here the 'male palm rule' as the unit of measurement was revealed to new factory workers, as the operators and supervisors were always of the appropriate gender, and they were usually eager to follow up on the policy. The exceptions were, perhaps inevitably, when a younger and more attractive worker decided to challenge the rules. As Sarah Chew reminisced, 'sometimes these girls were allowed to wear skirts that were up to their thighs' (interview with Sarah Chew, 13/1/2005).

Disciplining appearance did not stop at uniforms, as personal effects and accessories were often banned. Workers like Sarah Chew at the Kian Teck Lane factory were told that any personal belongings that did not fit into the pocket of one's uniform were banned from the factory. Large bins were placed in strategic corners of the factory floor for supervisors to publicly dispose of 'contraband' that was brought inside, whether by accident or purposefully. The most expensive item lost to the bins, Sarah recalled, was a 'Walkman'. Handbags were forbidden on the International Road factory floor, ostensibly so that the workers did not steal any of the lead components. 'Who wants to take those useless bits?' Lok Kwee stated dismissively, 'you can't do anything with one or two pieces of wire … it can't even be a toothpick, it's too soft!' (interview with Lok Kwee or is Sarah Crew , 1/12/2005).

All personal belongings were stored in assigned lockers, which workers had access to during their shift. The lockers were used for common items such as bottles of water, lunchboxes and umbrellas, which offered some respite from the tropical sun or monsoons to and from work. Locker checks were common, with supervisors conducting periodic spot checks. The justification given by management was theft prevention.

> They did it all the time, whenever they felt like it … no one dared to bring anything embarrassing to work. People felt ashamed to bring spare sanitary pads when they had their periods, as it was too shameful … and what if he waved it around and made fun of you? (interview, 6/12/2004).

The regimentation of the daily working routine, which kept the workforce in line, was a common subject for all of the interviewees in this study. It started at the beginning of your shift – 3.30 p.m. for Ngai Leong, who worked at a Printed Circuit Board factory on Corporation

Road in Jurong until 1986 – when you 'punched in'. Under the watch-
ful gaze of security guards, Ngai Leong would retrieve her work card in
the general passageway that led from the factory's foyer into the factory
itself until she arrived at one of six time-clock stations. She would insert
the work card into the clock to register the exact time (down to the sec-
ond) the operator showed up for work. The card was then placed in a
timecard holder above one's workstation, where it would be checked by
the line supervisor.

   Lateness was dealt with summarily, and it did not matter if someone
was late for work, or if someone got caught in a particularly long queue
at the time clock. If a worker was late, the supervisor would simply note
the exact amount of time an operator was late, on the card and on a cor-
responding docket that he kept with him. At the end of each month,
the amount of time missed by tardy workers would be tallied up and ap-
propriate action taken by the management. Workers who were more
than a half-an-hour late in total in a month were denied their year-end
bonus. Repeat offenders received disciplinary actions that ranged from
a lecture by one's supervisor to dismissal in more persistent cases (in-
terview, 6/12/2004).

   Workers were also often subjected to a 'disciplining gaze'. Mean-
while, their movements in the workplace were monitored by security
guards, line supervisors, QC operators and the occasional manager. The
recollection of a day in Ai Lek's work life provides a vivid and illuminat-
ing account on how this gaze operated. A bus would drop off a group
of some 30 to 40 female workers like herself to the telecommunications
factory in Ang Mo Kio just before 6 p.m.. They then filed around to-
wards the secured rear entrance of the plant. A watchful guard would
make sure that each woman was wearing her security badge, berating
the odd hapless victim for attempting to enter the factory without her
pass. Then they 'punched in' at the time clock, and from then on would
be carefully observed by surveillance cameras as they placed their be-
longings in their lockers. Here they would linger for a few minutes,
drinking coffee and catching up on the gossip. They were always acutely
aware of the security guards who passed the workers every other hour,
which was management's strategy for deterring theft. Like soulless
glass eyes, security cameras, mounted strategically throughout the fac-
tory, made one conscious of one's every action. QC operators would
keep track of idling younger employees on the assembly line, or those
who made mistakes due to inattentiveness. Line supervisors came by to
pick up the time cards and would check off an operator's progress on
target sheets that were posted at every workstation. If someone was
slow, she could expect a sarcastic comment, while the workers who
were consistently slow were often humiliated ridiculed or rebuked (in-
terview with Ai Lek, 6/12/2004).

Female workers who were involved in this project unanimously acknowledged that they were constantly aware of being watched; for some even the passage of time did not alleviate the stark consciousness of unwavering surveillance (interview, 6/12/2004). Sarah Chew describes some of these practices at her Kian Teck Lane workplace:

> You just learn to accept it. Maybe for some people it's harder because there's no privacy. Everything you do, even the embarrassing things ... you know, like picking your nose or adjusting your clothes, someone will surely see it. If you try to take it easy when you're not supposed to, watch out! The company will make sure you do OT (overtime) to make up for it. The really bad girls, they get fired. Just like that. They can always replace you (interview, 13/1/2005).

But there were others who thought that the disciplining gaze in the factory was necessary. The need for order was paramount for some of the workers, and can be understood as a manifestation of one of the PAP state's strongest claims to legitimacy in the everyday work environment – the perpetuation of the belief that the ruling party had brought stability and synchronisation to areas where there once was nothing but disorder and inefficiency. As Tim Harper notes, this was a discourse used in the telling and teaching of national history, and the fostering of a public memory that recalled the PAP's role in creating 'a bright new dawn ... [that] contrasted with the forces of chaos' and creating a 'biblical narrative of deliverance ... [which] has served the regime well in underscoring its role in Singapore's success (Harper 2001: 6).' An older factory worker who had experienced the turbulent era of industrial relations in the 1950s and early 60s first-hand recalled that:

> [Compared to the earlier factories, when] there were strikes all the time and those of us who wanted to work couldn't ... I think the factories later [during the 1980s] were a lot better. Most of us wanted to earn money and raise our families. I worked through those times, so I know ... the strikers were always troublemakers who wanted more for themselves ... it's good that the government could get them under control (interview, 6/12/2004).

A considerably younger operator, Chua Kai Lin, offered a similar perspective. She has worked at a computer hard disk manufacturing plant at Woodlands since the late 1980s. Safety and order were paramount if one was to achieve one's daily, weekly, and monthly productivity targets:

The security is one thing, but it is not only about us stealing from the factory. It is also about people stealing from each other, or sabotaging each other's progress [when people did not get along] ... All of this [security and surveillance] is necessary and leads to a workplace where you can just concentrate on meeting your target. That's all that matters. To you and to the company ... when the company does well, you keep your job and maybe even get a bonus. Everyone is happy. Take it from me, you cannot have a productive factory if you try to run it any other way (interview, 19/1//2004).

Productivity as an Ideology

The target that Chua Kai Lin refers to is an important concept in the factory world, both for the workers and their supervisors. Targets are the number of components completed in a pre-determined period of time. The nature of the factory – whether it manufactures shoes, clothes, leads and interconnectors, microchips, or hard disks – usually doesn't matter, as targets were used consistently throughout the manufacturing industry.

   Targets were prescribed at many levels. There were factory targets, which were usually comprised of monthly objectives as well as an overall annual objective. There were daily targets, which were allocated proportionately to each shift, a shift target, for instance, 100 hard disks needed to pass the Final Assembly stage by the end of an eight-hour shift. From there, an individual was also given a personal target for her station that needed to be met daily. Weekly targets tended to vary, and could be revised from one week to the next as production could be stepped up in the event of greater demand (such as the launch of a new product) or cut back when sales were less than expected. Daily targets were more concrete, however, and a worker needed to meet the target, except in the event where productivity was affected by factors beyond her control, such as technical failures of assembly line equipment (interview with Chua Kai Lin, 13/1/2005).

   The line supervisor (or the workstation supervisor) was in charge of ensuring that an individual met her target, and this is where the daily drama of discipline through productivity unfolded. Working at a telecommunications factory in Ang Mo Kio Industrial Park Two, Leng Yip recalled being placed under constant pressure by her supervisor to meet her target:

Once he knows who the slower workers are, he will keep coming back [to their station]. He will look over their shoulders, and if

he feels they are too slow he will show his frustration (the interviewee makes several loud *tsk* noises and sighs in an exaggerated fashion). It was very frustrating. After a while, some of the workers would react badly whenever he walked over. Some would begin to cry, and others would get nervous and make even more mistakes (interview with Leng Yip, 16/12/2005).

Charts showing individual targets were often put up on the factory walls (interview, 13/1/2005). These practices were designed to put more pressure on poor performers, and simultaneously foster a sense of competitiveness between the top performers. By most accounts, the charts never achieved the intended effect, although having one's performance gauged so publicly was stressful to even the most seasoned factory workers (interviews, 6/12/2004).

When someone's station could not keep up with the production pace, much of the factory would come to a standstill as the components became bottlenecked. A number of workers described the use of shame by supervisors to discipline female workers. Operators from other stations would be brought over temporarily to the affected post to help clear up the blockage on the assembly line. Meanwhile the worker(s) responsible for the station in question would be ridiculed. 'They would say things like, *wow,* you managed to stop the whole factory. Well done!' (interview, 13/1/2005) Ai Lek, who was subjected to similar treatment once when her station was responsible for a 'blockage', remembered that her supervisor spent the next few weeks mocking her. 'So *ah girl*, how many people do you need to be sent over to help you today to meet your target?' her supervisor would ask her at the start of her shift. 'What could I say to him? All I could do was to try and prove that I could reach my target even more so that he would shut up' (interview with Ai Lek, 6/12/2004).

The workers were also caught up in a broader, national drive of increased productivity – essentially a time where employers were given even greater control over their employees in the name of national interest. In the early 1980s, the state began to insist that workers develop a 'good work attitude' to maintain Singapore's competitive edge in the regional race for winning new foreign investments. Productivity, and not just cheap labour, was the buzzword of the 1980s for all those involved in the manufacturing sector. Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, in his 1981 May Day speech, exhorted:

The time has come for us to make a qualitative change in work attitudes. The Singaporean is an individual achiever. The Singaporean must now learn to be a team achiever. He must realise that he achieves more for himself by working smoothly in a team

to help the team succeed. Greater team spirit is the secret of suc-
cess in our next state of economic development. Whether it is in
the manufacturing or in the service, it is co-operation amongst
fellow workers, and between workers and management, which
will increase productivity. This is the meaning of good work atti-
tude (cited in Rodan 1989: 161-162).

As Rodan further observes, Lee's speech was followed by concerted at-
tempts by the PAP to 'cement in the population's consciousness the
close nexus between teamwork and productivity and ... worker/employ-
er relations (Rodan 1989: 162)'. Amid the intense and relentless cam-
paign in the media to promote 'productivity-consciousness', a Commit-
tee on Productivity was established in April 1981, which was replaced
by the National Productivity Council in September of that same year
(Rodan 1989: 162). The disciplining of the nation's workforce, by im-
posing a national work ethic and tying productivity to self-interest, was
underway.

In 1987, on the heels of a global recession and endorsed by the
NTUC, the NWC helped introduce a flexible wage system that would al-
low employers to withhold one per cent of an employee's salary as part
of an Annual Variable Component (AVC) of the wage structure. The
AVC was designed primarily with the manufacturing industry in mind,
and was quickly adopted by most corporations that had production cen-
tres located on the island (*Labour Rights Report* 2003: 16-17). The with-
held sum could either be paid out to the employee at the end of the
year as a 'bonus' at the employer's discretion, or 'to offset an antici-
pated drop on production (*Labour Rights Report* 2003: 16).' The rationale
for the AVC was that it gave employees an immediate and practical in-
terest in ensuring that the company was productive and performed well
while 'protecting employers from sharp economic downturns ... and by
tying wages to production ... this system enables the employer to reduce
or remove these payments if they need to reduce wage costs' (*Labour
Rights Report* 2003: 16). In reality, the AVC gave manufacturers even
more control over their workers. Failure to meet productivity standards
would essentially entail a reduction in wages.

Overcoming the Patriarchal Factory

It is tempting to conclude that the female factory workers were helpless
victims of circumstances. Conceding that the structural processes that
shaped the experience of everyday life for female factory workers were
absolute, Lim suggests:

> On the one hand, Third World women workers are obedient, dis-
> ciplined and conscientious, which makes them good, subservient
> and productive workers. On the other hand, their naïveté when
> confronted with multinational labor practices aimed at raising
> their work effort without commensurate monetary compensation
> makes it relatively easy for firms to raise productivity without
> raising costs, thereby raising profits considerably (Lim 1978: 27).

But the value of People's History comes to the fore when we apply the
evidence to closer scrutiny. Instead of regarding workers as a mere face-
less mass of numbers and statistics, when we recover the lived experi-
ences of the workers through a combination of oral history and micro-
sociology we can trace signs of agency. The world of the factory was a
complex space, where, rather than complete male hegemony, one can
show the tangled skeins of negotiation and resistance in key areas of
everyday life.

For instance, the female operators were not completely subservient to
factory management with regards to productivity. Although the labour
laws were stacked against them in Singapore, the laws did not require
them to work overtime unless they explicitly chose to do so. When a
production site looked like it was falling short of its weekly or monthly
target, or if production needed to be increased on short notice, line or
station supervisors would pass around record sheets for volunteers
among the women who were willing to work extra shifts or put in over-
time ('OT'). It is at this point that the supervisor and the factory worker
could negotiate. As one worker described it, the women could 'punish'
the most aggravating supervisors. A rude supervisor who was consid-
ered unreasonable and verbally abusive, one consistently made un-
wanted sexual advances towards the operators, or even supervisors who
were seen as 'weak' (in terms of authority) were all potentially ignored
when the OT list came around:

> He (the station supervisor) was so angry when nobody volun-
> teered. We had all agreed that no one would do OT for him to
> teach him a lesson [for verbally abusing some of the workers a
> few weeks earlier] ... He knew that we were doing it on purpose,
> but we all had excuses. One needed to go to a parent-teacher
> meeting, one needed to visit a sick relative, or felt weak because
> 'auntie' had arrived (a Chinese colloquialism for a woman having
> her period). He was so angry! However, in the end, serves him
> right ... after a few times, he became noticeably more polite.
> Unity is strength. That's what we learned quickly. (interview, 6/
> 12/2004)

Similarly, Ai Lek would have an opportunity to take revenge of a kind on a supervisor who had mocked her mercilessly:

> [Once the mocking began], all the workers refused to do OT for him after that. I felt very happy that my 'sisters' were standing up for me. Serves him right if he gets a dressing-down from the production manager! When he was moved to supervise a different line and a new supervisor replaced him, all of us were happy to do OT. In fact, we deliberately volunteered to do OT before he could even ask us. I know that he (her former supervisor) knew about this and it must have made him angry. Good! (interview with Ai Lek, 6/12/2004).

As Ai Lek describes it, supervisors who were unable to rally enough workers to pull an extra shift or to put in overtime to meet a variable target faced the prospect of having to explain the situation to his superior, the production manager. There was no direct threat to a line supervisor's job security when the female workers banded together to discipline 'errant' supervisors, or at least there was none discernable from the oral histories collected in this study. However, having it revealed that one cannot control one's own line was, to say the least, considered severely embarrassing and damaging to a supervisor's workplace reputation. Supervisors who lost control of 'their girls' were labelled 'cuckolds' – in other words, men who had lost (sexual) control over their wives – by the female workers (interview with Ai Lek, 6/12/2004).

In the odd case when upper management actually intervened in a situation that seemed to be getting out of hand it was usually to switch supervisors between stations. In short, despite the nature of the power relations in the factory it is clear that supervisors could not rely on 'sound and fury' to get what they wanted from their workers. In the longer term, the daily conduct of supervisor-worker relations directly correlated to a line's ability to meet productivity targets. A system of limited 'bartering' was thus commonplace in the factories, where the women would expect certain favours (such as extra or longer tea breaks, or more polite treatment from one's supervisor) in return for cooperation. Thus, discipline often ended up being a reciprocal affair (interview, 6/12/2004).

When it came to the ideology of productivity itself, workers were quick to question who the beneficiary of increases in productivity actually was. At Kian Teck Lane, one worker remembered a constant topic over morning breakfast: how much money their superiors were making and the bonuses that were being lavished on upper management for meeting company targets (interview, 13/1/2005). It is not surprising that workers were aware at some level of the hypocrisy of the state's produc-

tivity rhetoric. A lack of education does not preclude one from under-
standing how capital economies thrive.

This can be further corroborated by presenting quantitative data at a
broader level. Garry Rodan observes in his research notes that a survey
conducted in August 1982 by the National Productivity Board revealed
that 70 per cent of 590 interviewed workers felt that an increase in pro-
ductivity was beneficial to the company, and not to the worker. Even
more strikingly, the survey implies an obvious willingness to toe the
proverbial line where productivity was concerned, but to go no further
than one had to retain one's job, with less than 17 per cent of the re-
spondents inclined to participate in work activities that could raise pro-
ductivity (Rodan 1989: 238).

The resistance to the rhetoric presented by both the company and the
state can be corroborated when we look at the actions of individual
workers. At the Woodlands factory, Chua Kai Lin quickly learned that
the most important skill she needed to develop in her first month of
work was the ability to develop an 'inner clock' at her station, which, in
the early stages of her factory life, involved ensuring that the hard disks'
internal wires were neatly folded under four brackets, each no wider
than a millimetre, before being sent off down the line. A consistent
pace was necessary for two related reasons. Firstly, one did not want to
work too slowly because that would mean the prescribed target would
be missed, and hence a worker needed to learn how to get the job done
within a specific period of time. At the same time, one did not want to
work too fast, as Kai Lin reveals:

> If you work too fast you may make mistakes and get a lot of
> items returned to you from the QC operator. That means that
> you have to start over again. However, if you work too fast they
> may also raise your target – you can do so well, maybe you can
> do even better, right? That's how the company thought. You put
> yourself under extra pressure, and there's no reward for it. There
> isn't a cash prize or a big bonus if you surpass your target all the
> time so why bother? You also need to be careful because if you
> break your target people will think that you are trying too hard ...
> The supervisors will say, 'See, Kai Lin can do all this in the same
> time as you. Why can't you?' All this in order to inspire the
> others, but it doesn't work that way. That's the quickest way to
> get people to dislike you. By being too good (interview, 19/1//
> 2004).

The women in the patriarchal factories were also able to pursue other
strategies in order to circumvent the discipline. Youth, gender, and char-
isma could all be combined to one's advantage if a worker so wished.

While many women were subjected to unwanted advances from male superiors, some were willing to transform the patriarchal workplace to their advantage. Younger female operators often played on the paternalistic nature of the factory to gain benefits. Ngai Leong recalled how one young colleague constantly escaped reprimand by playacting when the line supervisor came to check on her progress. 'She was so good at acting. She would pout her lips and speak in a coy girlish way so that he would overlook her poor progress (interview conducted by author, 6/1/2/2004).' Her supervisor, an older man in his fifties, would merely shake his head and chide her gently, before moving on to the next station. If her backlog was particularly great, he would ask one of the other operators to help her. Once, Ngai Leong recalled, he even did some of it himself (interview with Ngai Leong, 6/12/2004).

Other women were willing to employ more 'adult-like' charms. At Ang Mo Kio, Leng Yip described how one supervisor – an older, married man – had the sexual attentions of more than one female worker. They had responded to his sexual advances, and it became known that those who gave in to his sexual advances were either promoted to better positions (presumably if they so wished), showered with gifts, or both (interview with Leng Yip, 16/12/2005).

Furthermore, despite attempts to create clear boundaries between the workplace and one's personal space, many workers were able to blur the lines between the two. The experience of factory life became far more manageable, and more humane when one was able to form communal relations. The monotony of meeting targets was often broken by jokes and playfulness wherever the opportunity presented itself. Ai Lek recalled how her colleagues would spontaneously burst into any number of popular Mandarin songs toward the end of a shift, while the younger workers would sometimes break into a small dance, holding a pretend microphone in their hands while gesticulating in an exaggerated fashion. Those who did not know the lyrics joined in anyway (interview with Ai Lek, 6/12/2004). Meanwhile, Chua Kai Lin remembered how her closest friend in the factory, an assembler who worked at the station next to hers, would sometimes sneak up on her from behind and tap her on one shoulder before quickly ducking behind the other, so that a puzzled Kai Lin would wonder for a moment who it was (Interview with Chua Kai Lin, 19/11/2004).

These small acts of playfulness, trite and almost self-indulgent at times, were remembered fondly as being the best parts of the female worker experience in the factories of Singapore. And it is critical that history remembers this as being more than simply an individual's nostalgic engagements with the past. Life in the factories, disciplined though it was for the women, was never totally wretched either because of the humanity that they were able to bring into each other's lives.

However, their 'Singapore Story' was not romantic, nor should it be romanticised. When we take history out of the community of Chinese female factory workers, give it the voice of life, and recover even the smallest and most mundane details of everyday existence, the lives of the female workers speak to us as individuals and as part of a collective. They narrate a Singapore Story that illuminates the tangled web of structural forces and individual agency, while neither totally subservient nor liberating oneself through self-determinism. Theirs is a story of constant discipline, being disciplined and disciplining themselves. Theirs is 'the Singapore Story' from below.

Oral Interviews Conducted for this Paper

Ai Lek, 6/12/2004. Interview by author and translated from Mandarin and Hokkien, assisted by Sim Er Ling.

Chua Kai Lin, 19/11/2004. Interview by author and translated from Mandarin, assisted by Sim Er Ling.

Leng Yip, 16/12/2005. Interview by author and translated from Mandarin, assisted by Sim Er Ling.

Lok Kwee, 1/12/2005. Interview by author and translated from Mandarin, assisted by Sim Er Ling.

Ngai Leong, 6/12/2004. Interview by author and translated from Mandarin and Hokkien, assisted by Sim Er Ling.

Sarah Chew, 13/1/2005. Interview by author, assisted by Sim Er Ling.

Teo Bee Hua, 17/11/2004. Interview by author and translated from Mandarin and Teochew, assisted by Sim Er Ling.

LOCATING IDENTITIES ACROSS BORDERS

7 Textualising the Baba Identity: Insights into the Making of a Bibliography[1]

Bonny Tan

Introduction

During a Heritage Week held in October 1986, over one hundred Baba titles were donated to the National Library in Singapore by a woman named Linda Lim (Hoe 1986). This private collection was later transferred to Singapore's National Library. It reveals, among other things, the hybrid culture of the Peranakan Chinese or Babas of the Straits Settlements with its own language, customs and history. Lim's kind donation supplements the existing collection of publications in the National Library, which documents the history of the Babas to as far back as the mid-nineteenth century, many of which have been relatively neglected.

Although there has been an increasing interest in the Baba community, there has yet to be a single bibliography dedicated to this subject. The closest is Lewis's (2000) online listing, which briefly lists related titles while Clammer's (1980) appended bibliographic essay is often referred to for its highlights of key titles. Even so, these listings remain cursory, with brief annotations, while excluding obscure sources or material in different formats such as those found online.

Academic dissertations and scholarly publications on aspects of the Baba culture, social identity and history have otherwise served as resources for bibliographic references on the community. Some of the better known are Tan Chee Beng's *The Baba of Melaka* (1988) and Rudolph's (1998) ground-breaking tome entitled *Reconstructing Identities: A Social History of the Babas in Singapore*, which provides one of the most comprehensive bibliographies, capturing not only the cultural identity but also the historical and political contexts of being 'Baba'. In his book's bibliography, Rudolph includes rare newspaper and journal articles dating from the late nineteenth century to the post-World War Two period. However, these listings are organised alphabetically by author and does not arrange the sources by subject, thus inhibiting further research.

There have also been several bibliographies of Peranakan literary works found in local as well as overseas libraries but the focus has lar-

gely been on works written by the Indonesian Peranakan Chinese.[2] Otherwise, the mention of Babas in bibliographic listings is, more often than not, only a subset of a larger documentation of works on other minority groups such as the Malays.[3]

Complementing these academic monographs are subject-specific publications on the Baba material and social cultures, which provides extensive bibliographical sources on these subjects. This list includes Ho Wing Meng's series on the Straits Chinese material culture while other authors have written about the *Nonya kebaya* (Endon Mahmood 2002, 2004), the *rumah Baba* (Lee and Chen 1998, 2006), and Peranakan-styled art works (Tung 1997, 2003). Social aspects of Baba community such as weddings (Cheo 1983), folk beliefs (Cheo and Muriel 1988) and the language (Gwee 2006) have also become the focus of entire publications. Even so, all of the above-mentioned works have bibliographies, which adopt an alphabetical-by-author listing rather than one by subject. Recent publications released at the turn of the twenty-first century have yet to be documented, which means that an updated and systematic bibliography was more than necessary.

The *Baba* Bibliography

In 2007, the *Baba Bibliography* was published by the National Library of Singapore. It consists of a compilation of a select and annotated listing of all known holdings of publications concerning the Babas within the National Library in Singapore and of dissertations in the Libraries of the National University of Singapore. The Bibliography is broadly segmented into nine subject areas, with annotations providing short summaries to each entry and an appended author-title index.

There were two motives for compiling and publishing this comprehensive bibliography. Firstly, in reviewing the span of published materials on the Babas held in Singapore's National Library, librarians were able to identify gaps in the collection and thus prioritise collection activities. For example, the bibliography revealed that there were many Baba plays staged even at the turn of the twenty-first century, but very few of the plays' scripts were ever published. Secondly, the *Bibliography* aims to serve as a tool for academics in defining new research areas. In bringing together diverse aspects of the community in a single publication, the *Baba Bibliography* can offer a multi-disciplinary approach in the study of the Babas and serve as a venue for the articulation of a more holistic understanding of the Baba community, its hybrid identity and hybrid culture.

More importantly, the *Baba Bibliography* is possibly the first fully annotated bibliography that brings together disparate subjects particularly

the factors that contributed to the making of the Baba identity. Other than merely building upon the existing bibliographies, the *Baba Bibliography* includes unexplored articles found in dailies, serials and ephemera published between the mid-nineteenth and the twenty-first century. Selectiveness has been limited in favour of comprehensiveness especially in areas where limited research has been conducted. Amongst these, articles that mention the Straits Chinese and its acculturated ways found in *The Straits Chinese Magazine* (1897-1907) and *The Peranakan* (1995-2006) have been annotated. Along with print resources, non-print materials such as CDs, DVDs, audiotapes and websites have been listed. Theses and unique items found in Singapore's National University Libraries were also included to enhance scholarly research potential.

Defining the Baba

Defining an ethnic community and the identity of a community remains a complex task for the fundamental reason that identity and cultural markers are fluid and seldom definitive. In defining the Baba community for the purpose of this *Bibliography*, ethnic, geographical, historical and cultural parameters were used as guidelines. The perspectives of both the academic and the community members were taken into account. The definition is, of course, not absolute and is used primarily to frame the contents selected for the *Bibliography*.

Ethnically, the Babas are Chinese men who came from the Southern provinces of China (mainly Fujian). Having taken women from the Malay Archipelago as their wives and the region as their adopted homeland, they developed a hybridised culture that merges local rituals and colonial values whilst retaining fundamental elements of Chinese identity. They are thus seen as a localised community of acculturated Chinese.[4]

Geographically, the Babas resided in the British Straits Settlements, namely Melaka, Penang and Singapore. Many Singapore Baba families trace their lineage to Melakan Baba families. However, Babas from these communities are not viewed equally. In the eyes of this line of Babas, the Penang Babas are considered as less acculturated, retaining a stronger Chinese culture especially in their language. Their dress and food have also developed a distinctive *nyonya* style different from their Southern cousins in Melaka and Singapore. Png (1969) categorised the Penang Babas as being a part of an outer concentric circle of the core Baba identity, which he termed 'Straits Chinese'. This was because Penang Babas were generally Hokkien-speaking rather than Malay-speaking. Khoo (1996, 37) notes that the *sinkek*, or China-born Chinese who had recently arrived in the Straits Settlements, had outnumbered the

Babas in Penang and thus absorbed the Baba community even prior to the British departure in the 1950s. By the 1940s, two-thirds of the Chinese in Penang were born in China.

In the larger geographic domain, Babas are often associated with the Indonesian Peranakan Chinese. However, the Babas from the Malay Peninsula have developed their own vocabulary of material and domestic culture distinct from the Indonesian community. Thus, although both communities are known as Peranakan Chinese, those from Indonesia do not reflect the same cultural heritage as those from the Straits Settlements. The Baba kinship ties have also extended into Thailand to include the Phuket Baba Chinese who are linked to the Straits Settlement Babas through the Penang Babas. In 2006, the Baba Convention, which is an annual event amongst the Peranakan Associations of Penang, Singapore and Melaka, was held at Phuket for the first time. The historical and cultural workings of this community have been studied by recent scholars in view of the renewed ties between the Phuket and Straits Baba communities (Khoo 1995 and 2006). Studies of acculturated Chinese in the region have also often made mention of the Babas when discussing the Peranakan-like Chinese in Kelantan (Thurgood, 1998 and Tan, 1984 & 2000) and the Chitty Indians of Melaka (Dhoraisingham 2006) although technically, these communities are unrelated to the Babas because they are not ethnically Chinese.

Historically, several Baba families trace their lineage to Melaka to as far back as the seventeenth century. The legendary marriage of a Chinese consort, Hang Li Po, to a Melakan prince, Sultan Mansur Shah, in the fifteenth century commonly serves as the genesis mythology for the Baba community.[5] However, it is only in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century that a hybridised culture began to flourish, as the Babas' wealth, legal and political standing strengthened. The Japanese Occupation diminished this wealth as many Baba families suffered the same persecutions as other Chinese families in Malaya. After World War II, however, with, decolonisation, the devolution of the Straits Settlements and the repatriation of the British, the Babas struggled to keep their political standing in the midst of rising nationalism. Although many Babas such as Tan Cheng Lock, Tan Siew Sin, Lee Kuan Yew and Goh Keng Swee took on important political positions either in Singapore or Malaysia, as a community, the Babas chose to submit their loyalty to the British. The end of World War II did much to strip them of their wealth, and with the coming of nationhood, their political prominence further met with a rapid decline (Rudolph 1998: 186-205).

Decline and estrangement, however, provided the essential pretext for the Babas' once privately guarded material culture and domestic artefacts to be exposed on the open market. Fuelled by an increased interest

in Baba goods, by the 1970s Baba culture had begun to project outside of the community. Books on the community and frequent social events such as plays and exhibitions propelled the Baba culture into the public sphere. Although many claim these were the death throes of Baba culture, elements such as Baba theatre, Peranakan food, *nyonya* (female) attire, and even the Baba language were, by the turn of the twenty-first century, adopted by both Singaporeans and Malaysians as part of their own unique national cultures. The Babas are popularly recognised today by their fusion of Chinese and Malay cultural expressions. Some examples are the Baba Malay language, their brightly coloured attire and their unique cuisine. Straits Chinese architecture and elaborate social customs are often typified as Baba even though these houses and rituals are in actual fact not unique to the community.

Ethnic boundaries and cultural markers remain cumbersome when used to define the Babas. Although Babas are adamant that to qualify as a member of the community, one must be descended from authentic hybrid parentage of Chinese Hokkien and Malay mix, be able to speak Baba Malay and the women must wear *Nyonya kebaya*, in reality, many so-called Babas today adopted these forms rather than being born into them. Even during their heyday, the community was not that easily defined and only an elite few would have qualified. Chua Ai Lin (2001) posits that the Baba identity and ethnic category should be defined along a continuum, rather than as discrete classifications (Chua 2001: 44).

Having said this, simplistic community markers were invariably used for the *Baba Bibliography* and this is manifested in a few broad subjects. The first category, 'Literature and Publishing', lists translated Chinese classics written in Baba Malay. It also includes modern writing, poetry and modern plays that refer to Baba life and culture along with their critical analyses. The 'Language' section covers dictionaries and word lists as well as linguistic and language studies related to Baba Malay or early Chinese-Malay adaptations in the Malay Peninsula. 'Social Life' includes studies on Baba demography, social history spanning the pre-World Wars (late nineteenth century) to independence (1960s), studies of the Peranakan associations, family and kinship, religion and festivities, culinary culture, education and entertainment. Meanwhile, 'Material Culture' includes resources on Baba architecture and place, attire, furniture, ceramics and porcelain, silverware, the visual arts and exhibitions and auctions. The fifth section covers 'Business Enterprise' and is followed by 'Biographies'. The seventh section, 'Area Studies', covers the Straits Settlements of Melaka, Penang and Singapore, as well as new studies of the Babas in Singapore, Malaysia and Southeast Asia. The *Baba Bibliography* concludes with 'Related Studies', which touches upon communities similar to the Peranakan in Kelantan and Terengganu, as well as the Thai Peranakans and the Indian Peranakans.

Baba Literature

In the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, a tangible Baba presence was evident in the publishing world as seen in the number of publications produced by the Babas and the various domiciled ethnic communities of the Straits Settlements. These titles ranged from translated Chinese classics and poetry to dailies and periodicals, which were written in Baba Malay. This period of active publishing coincided with the rise of the political and social influence of the Babas, which has been dubbed as the 'Golden Age of the Babas' by some (Rudolph 1998: 226).

In discussing Baba literature, the works that often come to mind are translations of Chinese classics into Baba Malay, familiarly known as *Chrita dahulu-kala [Tales of Long Ago]*. These were the pulp fiction of the day, and, although they were recognised as part of the corpus of Chinese literature, were neither original works by the Baba community, nor of great literary value for the Chinese. Despite the apparent lack of literary significance, the books provide insights into the Baba community as they are written completely in Baba Malay. They have proven to be a popular field of study with pioneering works by the likes of Salmon (1977) and Tan Chee Beng (1981). Salmon, well known for her bibliographical listing of literary works by Indonesian Chinese (Salmon 1981), also conducted studies of Baba literature as found in the Malayan Peninsula (1977). Her writings are mainly in French (Salmon 1972, 1974) with some translated into English (Salmon 1977). Yang Guiyi (Yang Quee Yee) has also written on Baba literature, and, as a member of the Chinese-speaking community, often gives an insider's perspective on this subject.[6]

Yoong's thesis (2001) developed a bibliometric study in the vein of Salmon's annotated bibliography (1981). Building on earlier studies of tales translated into Baba, he analysed the content of the publications, providing details of their physical descriptions and statistics of library holdings of these works. He also examined the background of the creators of these publications, namely the translators, publishers, and, in some instances, the illustrators. The stories are then categorised based on broad subjects such as history, romance, folklore and tales of chivalry. Yoong used these distinctions and categories thereafter to trace publishing trends.

Although many of these studies touch on trends in publication and the personalities behind the books, most of them simply list these titles. However, the *Chrita dahulu-kala* offers unexplored storehouses of material dealing with the Baba identity. Many of the translators were trilingual in English, Baba Malay and Chinese. They had travelled extensively around the Malay Archipelago and to as far away as Japan. Yet, little is

known about the translators such as Seow Chin San, Wan Boon Seng and Chan Kim Boon. Certain questions remain unanswered such as why specific Chinese stories were selected. It would also be interesting to compare the original stories with their loose Baba translations and the footnotes of the translators to see how these reflect the mindset of both the translator and reader of the day. The stories also often include glossaries of Chinese-Baba Malay and/or English explanations, which serve as some of the earliest dictionaries and wordlists of Baba terms used in context. Moreover, the publications often include personal letters, mainly commendations of the translated stories, along with commentaries by the translator concerning the sale of the titles or announcements of upcoming books. Long-running series included diverse writings that ranged from world news to jokes and riddles. But these are only cursorily mentioned in the studies of these Chinese translations. Teo L.T. (1980) examined Khoo Peng Yam's (1935-1936) *Khian Leong Koon Yew Kang* with regards to its use of Baba Malay and the integrity of the translation compared to the original. Hers is probably the only in-depth study of a specific Baba Malay translated text.

Educated Babas took the early lead in publishing in the Straits Settlements, not only in the range and number of publications but also in initiating the use of Romanised Malay over the Jawi script, which ultimately benefited both the Baba and Malay literate communities. During the late nineteenth century, publication of the earliest Romanised Malay[7] and even Chinese newspapers[8] were attributed to Babas. Newspapers such as *Kabar Slalu* (1924), *Surat Khabar Peranakan [Straits Chinese Herald]* (1924) and *A Friend of Babas* (1906-1908) included articles in the Baba tongue. Other periodicals associated with the Baba community such as *The Straits Chinese Magazine* (1897-1907) and *The Straits Chinese Annual* (1930) were published exclusively in English, showing the Anglo-colonial influence on the community. These periodicals provide an invaluable window into the community's interests and concerns at the time when the Babas were at the height of their political and social standing.

Besides news, editorial pieces and commentaries, the periodicals also published short stories, plays, poetry and *dondang sayang* lyrics. Thus far, only Holden (1998, 2003-2005) has paid any attention to these short stories, especially those found in *The Straits Chinese Magazine*, which he considers to be some of the earliest local literary works. Moreover, there are a few studies that analyse the content, context, distribution, audience and publishers of these periodicals. Baba writings and periodicals at the turn of the twentieth century often fall under the study of Romanised Malay publishing[9] or Chinese publishing but individual studies that focused solely on these Baba resources remain limited. The only studies on Baba periodicals are Nur Aidah's (1979) on the *Bintang Timor* and Lim Fong Nee's (1994), which explores Straits

Chinese identity as it was portrayed in *The Straits Chinese Magazine* and *The Straits Chinese Monthly*.

The published serials do not necessarily reflect the literary strengths of the Baba, who are renowned for their poetic and musical skills. Other than a few published sources, the melodious rhyming and wit found in *dondang sayang* have not been preserved and have all but faded away. There are early-twentieth-century limited collections of quatrains (Chan K.B. 1908), poetry (Tan P.T. 1916), *dondang sayang* songs (Koh H.T. 1911-1916) and even scores (Boey, Lee and Lim 1924). Sound recordings and videos of the traditional *joget* and *dondang sayang* events are unfortunately rare. Amend (1998) highlights the fact that 'Peranakan Chinese musicians do not record or publicly perform *dondang sayang* unless it is for a family gathering of some kind or an event associated with the Baba community as a whole. The reason for this is not that the Baba culture is reclusive but that it is exclusive.' (Amend 1998: 92-93). Nevertheless, Tan Sooi Beng (1996), in his study of 78-RPM Malay records, notes that the National Sound Archives in the UK holds a large collection of records by the Gramophone Company that dates from the 1900s. The EMI Archives has the only collection of Gaisberg's of Malay 78 RPM records and these two repositories could be explored further to see if they include any Babas recordings. The dearth of actual material, published or performed, has, however, not limited the study of the poetic art of *dondang sayang*. At least two academic studies (Amend 1998 and Low K. C. 1976) and one book (Thomas 1986) have been published, besides several in-depth newspaper articles, all of which make some reference to the Baba form of *dondang sayang* (Yusnor 1985).

On the other hand, the analysis of traditional Baba poetry is limited. Only Ding Choo Ming (2002, 2004) has taken pains to analyse them for their literary value. New publications in this field in recent years show a fresh take on the Peranakan's poetic style. Chee (2006) adds a new dimension to the study of Baba poetry as his modern works are written in the Penang Baba Hokkien dialect rather than the Baba Malay used by the Melakans and Singaporeans. Chee published both traditional ditties and compositions of his own, accompanied by photographs of Baba artefacts and short summaries of customs and culture. The translations by Lim Poh Keng are carefully rhymed in English. Kwok's (2005) more simplified compilation of Baba sayings exemplifies this growing interest in Baba verse and anecdote.

Closely related to the *dondang sayang* is the *wayang Peranakan*. The *bangsawan*, although of Malay origin and culture, exercised a strong influence on the *wayang Peranakan* (Rudolph 1998, 330-331). In fact, it is one of the few arts practiced by the Babas (though not specific to them) that was analysed contemporaneously (Shaik 1898 and Wilkinson 1897). Tan Sooi Beng (1997) remains an authority on this subject, pro-

viding one of the few academic insights into the evolution of the *wayang Peranakan* in the broader context of the *bangsawan*. Articles on Baba performing arts, theatre groups and performances are difficult to find despite the *wayang Peranakan* being a regular communal event since before the Second World War.

A new interest in Peranakan plays was ignited with the performance of Felix Chia's *Pileh Menantu* in June 1984. In successfully reinventing a modernised form of the *wayang Peranakan*, a host of Peranakan plays followed, which ranged from the caricatured matriarch in a predictable domestic comedy of errors, popular song and dance items, to literary gems like *Emily of Emerald Hill* (Kon 1989), which has gained international recognition. The plays not only serve as a form of entertainment for the Baba community but have also made the Baba culture accessible to a wider audience, as well as helping to shape a common Singaporean identity. In fact, Peterson (2001) suggests that plays like *Emily* were instrumental in making code-mixing and code-switching, now commonly heard in Singlish, acceptable in local theatre. Yet, the modern Baba play, initially successful, has been criticised for being predictable and shallow, rife with caricatures and rehashed storylines. Besides *Emily*, however, Robert Yeo's (1996, 45) call for staging plays beyond simple domestic scenes to truly highlight the lives of real-life Baba heroes has yet to be taken up. Nevertheless, Baba plays and musicals have become an annual event, drawing the community and the interested together to appreciate the re-enactments of the *wayang Peranakan* of the past.

Audio-visual recordings of some of the Gunong Sayang Association's productions are available on DVD and CD, but many of their earlier performances captured independently on video in the National Library collection are rapidly deteriorating. However, aside from the publication of the more familiar plays, very few Peranakan play scripts are found in any collection since many of them remain unpublished. Play reviews published in the local dailies offer possibly the only accessible source for significant details of these plays. Besides giving the storyline, these articles also provide insights into audience response, the use of the Baba language, the playwright and actors' perspectives and the impact of the performance on the Baba community. As for analyses of these plays, although there are more than a few articles on specific plays, there are only a limited number of scholarly studies of this recent phenomenon of modern Peranakan plays (Pakir 1986, 1989, 2005; Yeo 1996).

Determining publications that can be considered modern Peranakan literary works remains a tricky exercise especially since Baba Malay as a marker for identifying community membership has become redundant since English has been adopted as the language of communication for most Babas. The *Baba Bibliography* nevertheless has added a few titles of modern works, which reflect the Baba culture or have Babas as their

main characters or protagonists. Many are about *nyonyas* in pre-war Ma-
laya (Chin J.M. 1988; Chin K.O. 1984). Noteworthy is Yeap's (1992)
book, entitled *Of Comb, Powder and Rouge*, which was written in a light
and lyrical style to capture the perspective of an early-twentieth-century
nyonya and gives a voice to a once cloistered lifestyle. There is even a
children's book on Peranakan cats living at Emerald Hill and dressed in
cutesy *kebayas* (Kane 1986). Other titles are included in the *Bibliography*
because they are written by well-known Babas (Chia F. 1984 and Wee
H.C. 1993). In most of these writings, the context is usually Baba life in
and around the 1920s. These modern writings are thus not expressions
of the Baba present but rather reminiscences of the community past.

New technologies such as digitisation and the creation of databases
make these resources more accessible for further studies. For example,
the Institute of the Malay World and Civilisation (ATMA) has created a
portal – *Malay Civilization* – hosting information on collections of Malay
and Baba works. Poetry and *dondang sayang* lyrics published in books
and newspapers between 1899 and 1940s can be found in the *Pantun
Baba database*, which is part of the *Malay Civilization* portal. These in-
clude *Shaer Almarhoem* (1896) by Na Tian Piet, Panah Pranakan (Wan
Boon Seng)'s poetry in *Sri Pranakan* (1932), Wan Boon Seng's (1933)
Nyanyi-an extra-turns and *pantons* and Wee Hock Keng's (1963) *Sha'er
San Pek Eng Tai*. Many of these are no longer extant and are difficult to
find. The Singapore Digitised Books online portal of the National Li-
brary of Singapore also offers digital copies of Baba Malay works such
as *Chrita orang yang chari slamat* (Shellabear 1905) and *Sam Kok* or the
Romance of the Three Kingdoms (Chan K.B. 1892-1896). As technology
makes rare works more accessible, it is hoped scholarly research in this
field will expand.

Baba Language

Baba Malay has a Chinese linguistic framework but a Malay vocabulary
with added Chinese loanwords, mainly from the Hokkien dialect. Baba
Malay was used mainly by the Baba communities in Melaka and, there-
after, Singapore. Meanwhile, Babas in Penang used Baba Hokkien or
Penang Hokkien instead. At the turn of the twentieth century, Baba Ma-
lay was not just the language of a select community but 'the dialect of
commerce and the lingua franca of the Straits Settlements' (Tan C.B.
1988, 121).

Shellabear's essay on Baba Malay is considered one of the earliest
studies of the language (Shellabear 1913). Contemporaneous language
studies were mainly word lists and dictionaries of Malay for the Chi-
nese or for the British (Hamilton 1924; Lin 1900). It was only at the

end of the twentieth century, when there was a revived interest in the Baba culture, that dictionaries and Baba Malay word lists were actually published. These are primarily the work of one man, Gwee Thian Hock (1993, 2006). In recent years, Penang Peranakan Tan Choon Hoe (2001) has also published a guidebook of the Penang Hokkien dialect while Baba Philip Chan (2007) created a workbook to practice Baba Malay. Works increasingly added to this pool of linguistic knowledge will form an invaluable resource for new word studies.

It is in the sociolinguistic application of the language that Baba Malay is studied in greater detail. Motivated by the perceived decline in language use, a dying generation of Baba Malay-speaking Peranakans and the need to capture the social and historical context of language use, several academic studies were undertaken to analyse Baba Malay. These include Tan's (1980, 1993) on understanding the Baba's language as a dialect of Malay; Sonny Lim's (1981), which considers the language of the Straits Chinese; Pakir's (1986), which gives a linguistic analysis of the language; Cheong's (1992) with reference to naming and addressing in the language; Chung's (1992), which is a sociolinguistic study on politeness in Baba Malay; Yun Weili's (1996), which provides one of a few studies of the language in Chinese; Adele Lee's (1999), which focuses particularly on grammar and Gabriel Wee's (2000) study on intonation. This simple survey of publications on the socio-linguistics of Baba Malay shows the wide breadth of research areas in this field.

However, few have turned to existing print sources for the study of the Baba language. The Baba language was, for example, used in early Christian publications in the Straits Settlements. Shellabear was instrumental in translating some of these works and in particular, the publication of the first *New Testament* or *Kitab Perjanjian Bharu* (1913) in Lower Malay for the Straits Chinese. The nineteenth-century Chinese classic tales translated into Baba Malay along with the Baba newspapers and periodicals of the same period provides a snapshot of the Baba language preserved in its original state of use. The non-standardised spelling reflects how the words were spoken, capturing inflexions and pronunciations peculiar to the Babas. In some of the translated Chinese tales, there are points of clarification made in English, showing terms that may not be familiar to the more English-educated Baba reader. Despite this wealth of information, only two academic studies analysed the linguistic structures of Baba Malay based on the Baba's previously published resources (Thurgood 1998; Teo 1980).

The Baba language is far from dead, however. Besides the Baba theatre, religious services are one of the most accessible resources for the study of Baba Malay. It is still used in several Peranakan church services in Singapore today. At least seven Singapore churches conduct weekly services in Baba Malay – Kampong Kapor Methodist Church, Bethesda

Katong Church, Pentecost Methodist Church, Paya Lebar Methodist
Church, Pasir Panjang Hill Brethren Church, Bethesda Frankel Estate
Church, and the Church of the Holy Family. All are Protestant churches
except for the Church of the Holy Family, which is Catholic. Many have
been conducting these services for several years and may have gener-
ated some print resources. These religious services held in Baba Malay
include the use of Baba choruses, sermons and even religious plays.
However, few of these are being collected, recorded or studied.[10]

Baba Material Culture

Since the late 1970s, the Baba material culture has been extensively re-
searched and published in beautifully illustrated tomes. The colourful
images and descriptions have created a vocabulary of the Baba culture,
which has now become familiar to most. This phenomenon was partly
fuelled by popular interest in these artefacts since the 1970s, which led
to a growing audience of collectors, antique dealers and curators.

Since the 1980s, the interest in the material culture of the Babas was
fanned by museum exhibitions and auctions. The 'Peranakan Heritage'
exhibition at the Singapore National Museum in 1988 was preceded by
the 'Warisan Baba dan Nonya' held at the Muzium Negara in 1983 and
smaller exhibits of specific aspects of material culture (Lum 1988).
However the former's popularity led to the opening of the Straits Chi-
nese Gallery at the National Museum in Singapore. A permanent exhi-
bition, entitled 'Peranakan Legacy', was launched at the Asian Civilisa-
tion Museum in 2000 at Armenian Street in Singapore. By April 2008,
a museum dedicated to the Baba artefacts and culture was reopened in
the same location. The domicile of Baba Wee Bin located off Chinatown
in Singapore, which was purchased through a donation by Tan Cheng
Lock's sole surviving daughter Agnes Tan, is currently being renovated
to create a social heritage space for the Peranakans as well as house the
Peranakan Association. Thus, small subject exhibits in Singapore focus-
ing on specific aspects of Baba material culture soon grew to become
gallery exhibitions, and ultimately independent museums, highlighting
the rich array of the Baba material culture. Similarly in Malaysia, the
Baba Museum in Melaka and the transformation of various mansions
in Penang into Peranakan museums show the viability of sustaining
such cultural exhibits.

Publications by curators and auction catalogues have helped preserve
the colour and beauty of many delicate craftwork objects (Chin E. 1993
and Khoo J.E. 1996). Insights by these curators show not only an appre-
ciation of the static goods but also a new understanding of the historical
and communal context of the material culture. In the realm of material

culture, however, Ho Wing Meng dominates the literature especially with his publications on Straits Chinese silver (Ho W.M. 1976, 1984, 2004), beadwork and embroidery (Ho W.M. 2004), furniture (Ho W.M. 1994, 2003) and porcelain (Ho W.M. 1983, 2004). For each of his works, the history, craftsmanship, function and design of the artefacts are accompanied by colour photographs, resulting in a vivid, multidimensional description of his subjects. In the area of furniture, silverwork and even porcelain, there are few authors that can rival the rich information found in Ho's publications. Despite the profusion of detail, community members do not necessarily agree that such material culture is peculiar to the Baba community.

Nonetheless, beadwork and embroidery can be considered an authentic Baba craftsmanship. These are the handiwork of *nyonyas* trained since they were young to create these beautiful domestic items as part of their marriageable skills. It is also one of the few material cultural elements that have become appreciated again in modern times. Much has been published about the style, symbolism and value of the work found in *kasot manek* and the *nyonya kebaya*. The publications by the late Datin Endon Mahmood (2002, 2004) that followed the well-received exhibitions of her collection of *kebayas* have helped spur renewed interest in these clothes. Their affordability has encouraged modern *nyonyas* and non-*nyonyas* to invest heavily in the modern *nyonya kebaya* and their accessories with designs of the *nyonya kebaya*, *kerosang* and *kasut manek* naturally evolving to suit modern tastes. This, along with an increasing number of classes in Baba beadwork, has led to a significant push toward reviving the art of recreating *nyonya* wear.

In terms of architecture, the style known as Singapore Eclectic (Keys 1983) or Straits Eclectic (A. Ghafar 1994; Khoo 1996, 133) has become associated with the Babas.[11] The style adopted by the Straits Chinese takes design elements from the Chinese, Malay, Javanese, Arabian and the various colonial masters that ruled the Straits of Melaka. Colonial influences on architecture include the Anglo-Indian styles adopted in the Straits Chinese façade, and in Melaka, the Dutch influence is seen in the roof tiles and red *laterite* flooring (Tan S.C. 1983, 47) while the Portuguese influence is found in the balustrades and Iberian façade (Villiers 1988). Besides the elaborate physical design of Baba houses, their domestic life also offers fascinating details of their hybrid culture. For insights into this area refer to Lee and Chen (1998) as they explore beyond the façade of the Baba house to show the activities of the Baba home, along with its social rituals and rich material culture.

Certain places and locations have had strong associations with the Babas. For example Emerald Hill, Katong and Joo Chiat have popularly been known as Peranakan enclaves even though they were not exclusively Baba community residential areas. A closer examination of the

histories, residential constitution and relationship between the Babas and their neighbours in these communities can shed light on the Babas' relations with the wider local society. Conversely, locations such as Heeren Street in Melaka and Telok Ayer in Singapore were known as the Baba residences for the community's elite. However, there has been little discussion about the peculiarities of Baba lifestyle in these areas besides the mention of their architectural heritage. Moreover, there was the exercise in the 1980s, to revive the Baba style in the houses along Emerald Hill and turn the nearby Peranakan Place into a commercial location using Baba culture as a magnet. This attempt and its failure, to reinvent a Baba locality to some degree in the urban renewal of the Peranakan Place can also serve as a lesson when it comes to attempts to reinvent place and culture in the modern context.

The Baba material culture's vibrancy has led to the flourishing of new art forms. Paintings that feature material aspects of the Babas, especially seen in the works of Martin Loh, Desmond Sim and Tang Yue Nang, reflect this new development (Seah 2004). Could this possibly be the early expressions of a Baba vision in art that is based on a confidence and appreciation of all things Baba?

Today, the Baba material culture remains a strong commercial product, enabling whole towns such as Melaka to thrive on the trade in Peranakan goods. from the departments of Tourism of Singapore and Malaysia are further stimulating this trend by marketing the community and its kitsch souvenirs to its visitors. However, even while such publications and activities seem to define the Peranakan culture, community members themselves often question if there is such a thing as a Baba material culture. This dichotomy seems to beckon further investigation and study.

Social Life of the Babas

The unique customs and rituals of domestic life of the Babas have become the focus for many studies and publications. These titles cover primarily ritualistic and extravagant events such as weddings and the communal celebrations such as Chinese New Year festivities. Many of these ceremonies were at their height of ritualistic elaboration around the turn of the twentieth century. Although these ceremonies are reflective of Hokkien culture and not necessarily unique to the Babas, they do display cultural adaptation of Southern Chinese beliefs and rituals. This is especially evident in Ng's study of the Sam Poh Neo Neo Temple (Ng C.S.H. 1977, 1983) where Malay influences are seen in the primarily Chinese religious practices. More interestingly, many of these

traditional Baba customs capture ancient Chinese rituals of the Qing dynasty long forgotten in the motherland.

However, it is in the animistic practices of both Chinese and Malay origins that the unique hybridity of Baba culture presents itself in religious rites and rituals. Aspects of this culture remain in the superstitious beliefs and practices in everyday Baba life as outlined in Cheo and Muriel's publication *Baba folk beliefs and superstitions* (1988). Clammer (2002) has also given a summary outline of the Baba's conceptual cosmology of magic and spiritualism. Elliott (1955, 1990) in his groundbreaking work on Chinese spirit-medium cults elucidates the peculiar practices of the Straits Chinese who have adopted shrines of pre-Muslim Malays with Hindu antecedents as their own. Such Chinese temples collocated with pre-Muslim Malay shrines or Datok Kramat remain popular sites for Baba worship[12] with many Chinese and other worshippers regularly making pilgrimages there even today.

The Katong Catholic Church annually celebrates the *Misa Sambut Kepala Tahun Baru China* (Wee A. 1989 and Wong R. 1989). The service is an example of the 'inculturation' of Chinese practices into the Catholic faith ritual. During the service, Peranakan traditional sweet meats and goodies are brought in through an offertory procession and the altar table is laid out with items of symbolic significance for the Lunar New Year. The service is a recent development, started by a Peranakan, Father Alfred Chan in 1985.[13] Although mention of Chinese Taoist practices and Christian celebrations are often made in Baba publications, a thorough study of the hybrid religious rites and rituals from the perspective of the Baba community, particularly their inculturation of various local elements into the Chinese belief system has yet to be carried out. Besides several articles in *The Peranakan* on the Chinese religious rites and rituals, there is limited information on the hybrid practices and beliefs found in the Baba's understanding of his religion.

Beyond religion, the domestic art of culinary preparations can also reveal a lot about the community's non-material culture. A slew of cookbooks have unveiled the secrets to this treasured *nyonya* skill. *Nyonya* cooking has been all the rage ever since restaurants claiming to be Peranakan have enabled others to taste its tantalising flavours. Several television series on Peranakan cooking soon followed. The long-running series *The ways of the matriarch* (Tan C.C. 2003, 2004) weaves stories of Baba ritual, customs and superstitions into each cooking episode.[14] However, few have really analysed the etymology of *nyonya* Peranakan cooking – its origins and influences. Early travelogues provide more narrative and description by curious foreigners rather than actual analytical insight. For example, Vaughan offers hilarious insights in his descriptions of the rude explosions of a Baba after his meal. He also has interesting details of the making and consumption of *Balachan* (Bela-

can) (Vaughan 1879: 36-37). Koh's 1964 article on Melakan Baba cuisine is possibly one of the earliest modern writings to examine the preparation and cultural influences in *nyonya* Peranakan cooking. A few academics (Tang 1997 and Yeow 1999) have reviewed Peranakan cuisine as an ethnic marker. William Gwee, Violet Oon and Sylvia Tan have also given insights into specific dishes, kitchen ware, ritual foods and the practices surrounding them with Sylvia Tan adding a modern twist to traditional dishes.[15] Ananda Rajah (2003) has also looked at the hybridity of cultures in Peranakan foods.

It is Tan Chee-Beng (1998, 1999, 2001) who remains foremost in analysing the influences on and the symbolic functions of Peranakan food. In his 2001 article on Chinese food and ethnicity, Tan Chee-Beng details the Malay, Indian and Portuguese influences on Melakan Peranakan cooking with reference to recipes by Lee Chin Koon (1974) and Cecilia Tan (1983). Comparing cookbooks in this manner, especially those published over the decades, provides a breadth of understanding about the creation and evolution of *nyonya* dishes. Analysing regional difference between Melakan and Penang dishes can also show unique influences on Baba cooking. With the *Baba Bibliography* listing cookbooks, videos, restaurant reviews and newspaper articles describing the preparation and flavours of *nonya* cooking, possibly more can be discerned concerning the cuisine's history and its changing symbolism and tastes.

Baba business and leisure, the foundation of social life is seldom described except in passing. It is generally assumed that the Babas were mainly involved in clerical and government positions, an elite status acquired because of their proficiency in the English language and their familiarity with the Anglo-culture. Yet, it is a well-known fact that many *nyonyas* married wealthy Chinese merchants while other Baba families established themselves through the mercantile trade. However, studies of Nanyang merchants often do not make a distinction between the newly immigrant merchant and the long-term resident Baba merchant. Profiles of outstanding Baba merchants can form an initial baseline for studies on how the Babas gained their wealth and how they returned their wealth to society.

With wealth came the leisurely lifestyle of the Babas. The *nyonyas* are infamous for their addiction to gambling games like *cherki*. However, there are more respectable recreational activities that the Babas have indulged in. This is evidenced in the clubs they have established such as the Straits Chinese Swimming Club (today the Chinese Swimming Club) (Teo G. 1998) and the Straits Chinese Recreation Club (today the Singapore Recreation Club). They were even active in music and drama (Lim H.H. 1930), often adopting Malay influences in these performing arts. Their love of sports was of a more Western taste (Lim H.H., 1930) and included boxing (Oei T. 1995) and horse racing (Lye W.C. 2005).

The advertorials in Baba periodicals such as those found in *Kabar Slalu* and in publications such as the later editions of *Chrita Dahulu-kala* give a different dimension to Baba leisure activities. Written in Baba Malay, these advertisements announce products, services, culinary delights, upcoming *wayang Peranakan* and recreational activities that would appeal to the community. They thus give a glimpse into the social interests and material tastes of educated Babas, the services purveyed to the community and their purchasing powers. However, the Baba social life and leisure activities have not been examined in much depth.

Socio-identity of the Babas

The increasing interest in the Baba's material culture since the 1970s was heralded by the publication of studies examining the Baba identity. Perspectives from academics (Clammer 1980; Tan C.B. 1988; Lim L.P. 1970; Gan L.L. 1979), curators (Khoo 1996) and community members (Chia F. 1980; 1983; 1994) gave greater depth to the study of the community, where in the past Babas were mentioned only within studies of the Chinese in the Malayan Peninsula (Purcell 1948; 1960; 1965; 1967).

John Clammer set the tone for academic discussions on the Baba identity by providing sociological insights (Clammer 1979; 1980). At the same time, Tan Chee-Beng (1988) provided an ethnographic analysis of the community in Melaka based on his 1979 doctoral thesis. Details of customs, culture, language and religion, based on observable practices, make their social definition of the Babas more concrete. Conversely, the community began to reflect more on their own identity. Anecdotal accounts of the community's social and historical decisional processes is seen in Felix Chia's works (1980; 1983; 1994), providing a vibrant picture from an insider's perspective.

Rudolph's *Reconstructing Identities* (1998) redefined the concept of Baba identity by describing it in the context of history, tracing the community's evolution in the midst of political and social change spanning Singapore's earliest colonial times to independence. Rudolph, thus, provides the first thorough chronological account of the evolution of the Baba identity. In doing so, he uncovers various assumptions and discrepancies. One of it is the lack of data on pre-colonial Babas, especially regarding Chinese settlements along the Peninsula. He is adamant that there is 'no reliable evidence that a Chinese settlement predates the seventeenth century' with noteworthy Baba families tracing their family line only as far back as the second half of seventeenth century in Melaka (Rudolph 1998, 81 and 82). Sandhu (1961) corroborates this after examining evidence from Chinese, Malay, Portuguese and Dutch sources.

Reid (2006) however raises the possibilities that there were hybrid Chinese-Malay communities resident in the Malay Archipelago as early as the fifteenth century.[16] Tracing the existence of the earliest Chinese settlements in the Straits of Melaka and the possibility of hybrid Sino-Malay communities prior to the seventeenth century thus remains an active area for scholarly research especially with renewed interest in early references to this region and new archaeological findings.

The contemporary cultural definitions of the Babas are however, inadequate when attempting to define Baba identity and instead an understanding of the social history of the Babas is required. Rudolph notes that, prior to World War II, the Babas or Straits Chinese were identified by their political and legal status (Rudolph 1998: 203). The term 'Straits Chinese' was, by 1852, a legal definition that transformed certain Chinese immigrants into British subjects (Rudolph 1998, 43). Although applicable to all resident Chinese, the term came 'to be associated with status (and) wealth' (Rudolph 1998: 43), a position which the localis, English-speaking Babas were to acquire rapidly.

Unfortunately, the political and legal status of the Babas prior to their post-war decline is mentioned only in passing in most publications. Only Adrian Ong (1990) has made a study of the complex expression of the Straits Chinese identity in pre-war British Malaya with reference to their political and legal status. Otherwise, contemporary newspaper articles are useful but they seldom explored primary sources for understanding the political aspects of the Babas during pre-war Malaya. Studies of key organisations and leaders also provide insights into the political development of the community. In fact, Lee Yong Hock's (1960) history of the Straits Chinese British Association goes beyond describing an institutional history and reveals instead the development of Baba politics before and after World War II. Publications on the life of leaders such as Lim Boon Keng (Khor 1958), Song Ong Siang (Ching 1973), Tan Cheng Lock (Soh 1959; Yeo 1990), his son, Tan Siew Sin (Lim B.K. 1990) and contemporary leaders such as Tan Chin Tuan (Lee 1995) describe their leadership in the context of changing times when British colonial powers influenced the structures of the Straits Chinese community. Many of these leaders have respective bibliographies, which can aid in-depth studies of their influence on the community and beyond (Ang and Tan 2007; Lim P.P.H. 1989).

With the end of the war, the Babas struggled to redefine themselves. The transformation of the King's Chinese to becoming the nation's people is best captured in the biographies of the ordinary people today. Many locate their stories at the turn of the twentieth century when the Babas were at their height of wealth and power. However, a few biographies cover the struggles of more impoverished Babas (Lim S.H. 1997; Chia J. 2002) or those facing a sudden loss of wealth (Lim S.G.L.

1996). It is in comparing the lives of Babas before and after independence, that the transformations come best to the fore. The separate stories of father and son, Lee Kip Lee (1999) and Dick Lee (2004), serve as a striking example of such a contrast. Senior Lee describes the halcyon days of Babas living in the lap of luxury and the sudden downturn suffered during the Japanese Occupation. Meanwhile, the younger Lee explores the search for identity and a sense of being Singaporean through his life's adventures and his song writing. Though seemingly disparate, they are the voices of Babas for their respective eras and comparatively, show the continuing evolution of their communal identity.

However such aspects of the evolving Baba identity are few and far between. Most publications of the twenty-first century reflect the socio-identity of the Baba like a warped mirror, trapping the Baba image in the literature, language and culture of the early twentieth century.

Conclusion

The late nineteenth century is seen as a time of Baba awakening, evidenced by the number of publications in Baba Malay, their increasing material wealth, and their political standing in both colonial systems and oriental clan groups. A century later, the resurgence of interest in Baba culture began and, since the 1970s, it has not waned and has been primarily channelled through visual and multi-sensory experiences such as plays, exhibitions, shops and restaurants with publication paralleling this interest.

However, the modern publications always depict the Baba as locked in another time, in an idealisation of times past. Whether it is a biography, a book on material culture or a sociological study, it is the pre-war Baba who is depicted. Is it because Baba practices serve as a repository of the old cultures that were once the domain of Singapore's original immigrants and have now long faded away? In many ways, the Babas retain the cultural practices of the Chinese and Malay that they themselves seldom practice anymore in their own communities. For example, only the Babas continue to take pride in the complex wedding garment worn by the Chinese in the late Qing period. The *dondang sayang* rhyme and song style, which originated with the Malays, was maintained by the Babas for some time when strict laws prevented the Malays from performing their own crafts. The delicate voile and see-through cutting of the *kebaya* are only worn by the Babas as religious prohibitions prevent the Malays from wearing these ethnic clothes today. Teasing apart the warp and woof of the hybrid Baba culture is as complex as defining it but the effort can reveal more than just the threads of a single culture.

According to Rudolph's picture of the evolving identity of the Babas, they continue to change right up until the present day. Whilst more can be done to articulate the historicity of Baba identity, it is the changes in today's Baba community, the definitions of being Baba and its acceptance as a national identity that requires further study. While, on the one hand, spoken Baba Malay is seldom used, the number of publications devoted to the Baba language has never been so plentiful. If the community is fading fast, why is there a seeming resurgence in interest in the language? If Baba households have disgorged their possessions why are there attempts to recreate a Baba house or a museum or even build housing developments marketed as Peranakan design? Has the Baba identity finally been laid to rest or has it, instead, become part of a national identity, promoted and coaxed to life because it exemplifies the racial harmony and integration the government so desires? Has the uniquely Baba identity become the uniquely Singaporean identity? Or has the Baba community gained its own voice and truly renewed its culture? Tan writes:

> ... even if the Singapore Baba were in future reincorporated into the larger non-Baba Chinese society, it will be an incorporation into the Singaporean Chinese identity which contains certain aspects of Baba identity. Their history will continue to be remembered as a part of Singapore history, and aspects of their culture like *nyonya* food and certain local ways of life will continue to be part of the larger Singapore culture. (Tan 1993: 57).

Tracing this evolution of Baba identity can only be seen as new studies emerge and this, in turn, is made possible only with the ongoing archiving of Baba publications and records, both old and new.

Glossary

Except for those marked with *, all explanations of terms are derived from Gwee (2006).

*Baba – in this chapter, it is used to refer to the acculturated Chinese community previously found in the Straits Settlements. It is also used to refer to the male members of this community. The community is today more familiarly known as Peranakans, although this is not to be mistaken with the Indonesian Peranakan Chinese.

bangsawan – Malay opera

belachan – shrimp paste (it is a condiment popularly used in Peranakan cuisine)

dondang sayang – quatrain (verse of four lines) in Baba or Malay sung to
    a tune
kasot manek (kasut manik) – beaded slippers worn in the Baba commu-
    nity
kerosang – brooch in sets of three used to fasten the front of *nyonya* gar-
    ments viz. the *baju panjang* and *kebaya*
*misa sambut kepala tahun baru china – mass to usher in the beginning
    of the Lunar New Year (Wee, 1989)
nyonya – Baba Peranakan lady
nyonya kebaya – a *nyonya* long sleeve blouse worn with a sarong
*rumah baba – Baba home
sinkek (singkek) – new immigrant from China; newcomer; unfamiliar
*wayang Peranakan – Baba form of theatre with adaptation of Malay
    and Chinese forms

Notes

1   The paper is based on significant research that has been conducted under the auspices of
    the National Library Board, of which a reference bibliography on the topic was produced
    in 2007. Tan, Bonny, Ang, Seow Leng and Noryati Samad (eds). *A Baba bibliography: A se-
    lect annotated listing of sources on the Peranakan Chinese* (Singapore: National Library Board,
    2007).
2   These include Mohd, G. and Selamah (1988), Universiti Malaya (1979) and Salmon's
    (1981) important annotated bibliography.
3   For example, Proudfoot (1993) lists holdings of Baba books in his publication on early Ma-
    lay works.
4   Tan, Chee-Beng (1988). *The Baba of Melaka: Culture and identity of a Chinese Peranakan
    community in Malaysia*. Selangor: Pelanduk Publications.
5   Rudolph (1998) argues that a fifteenth-century, hybridised community could not have ex-
    isted and that the earliest trace of the Baba community in the Straits of Melaka is likely
    the seventeenth century (Rudolph 1998: 81 and 82).
6   Details of Yang Quee Yee's works and collections can be found at the website entitled *Ma-
    lay Civilization* http://www.malaycivilization.com/main.asp.
7   The *Bintang Timor* is considered the first fully Romanised Malay daily newspaper. It was
    founded by Baba Song Ong Siang.
8   *Lat Pau*, the first Chinese newspaper in Singapore, was founded by Melakan Baba See
    Ewe Lay (Chen 1967: 24-26)
9   These include Md. Sidin (1998) and Proudfoot (1993).
10 Based on a personal communication with Philip Chan, a Baba pastor.
11 However, in publications such as Edwards (1991) and Lee K.L. (1988), mention of Eclecti-
    cism is related more to a Western style – Victorian Eclecticism (Lee K.L. 1988, 59-60) and
    there is no mention of a style known as Straits Eclecticism or Singapore Eclecticism. Lee,
    a Baba architect, instead describes the wealthy Straits Chinese as adopting the Western
    style of design for their homes while incorporating local Malay features (Lee K.L. 1988:
    94-105).
12 Chia, F. mentions that Babas worshipped at the temple of Tua Pek Kong at Kusu Island
    where the Kramat Habib Noor is collocated (Chia, F. 1983: 36).
13 In *Reunion and mass for Peranakan* 1985, 13 and *Peranakan New Year prayers* 1985: 2.

14 Also Kenny Chan's *The cook, his food and the dishy nyonyas* (Cheah U.H., 2001).

15 Refer to the *Bibliography*, section 3.7. Culinary Culture, for a full listing from these authors.

16 Newbold notes that the 'early European navigators found colonies of Chinese scattered over Java, Borneo and other islands. They are also located in states removed beyond the pale of British dominion; in those of Siam, Borneo, Tringanu, Pohang, and in numberless others.' (Newbold 1839: 9-10).

8 Negotiating Identities, Affiliations and Interests: The Many Lives of Han Wai Toon, an Overseas Chinese

Sharon Wong Wai Yee

Introduction

It has been commonly noted that the Chinese overseas are 'clannish', business-minded and utterly loyal to their homelands, which they long to return to. This is not surprising given that most Chinese in pre-World War Two Singapore were generally businessmen or workers who saw their multifaceted activities in Southeast Asia as temporal and transient. Unlike many overseas Chinese in his time, Han Wai Toon (1892-1970) took on a Southeast Asian-Chinese identity, whilst maintaining very strong emotional links to his Chinese homeland, Hainan. Besides his affiliations with Southeast Asian-Chinese academic organizations, he was involved in the activities that were organized by certain clan associations, such as the Qiongzhou clan association and Han's clan group.

More importantly, he was a pioneer in the study of Chinese trade ceramics in Southeast Asia. As a member of two scholarly organizations that were conducting research on Southeast Asia – the South Sea Society and the China Society – upon his arrival in Singapore in 1915, Han propounded the idea that Chinese trade ceramics that were found in Southeast Asia were 'the cultural relics of our country (China), and they need to be collected' and, if possible, returned to their place of origin – China. In his book *Nanyang yiliu de Zhongguo guwaixiao taoci* (Ancient Chinese Export Ceramics Inherited by Southeast Asia), Han uses the term 'inherited' (*yiliu*) and not 'discovered', as well as 'export' rather than 'import', to describe the Chinese trade ceramics that he found in Southeast Asia (Han 1960a, 2005). Han mainly focused on Chinese ceramics rather than Southeast Asia ceramics in his studies because Chinese trade ceramics provided him with a window towards understanding the Chinese identity as it was manifested overseas. In 1962, Han returned to China and donated a large part of the ceramics he had collected to the Beijing Palace Museum. He continued his research on Chinese trade ceramics at the Beijing Palace Museum until his untimely death in 1970.

So atypical was Han compared to other Chinese overseas during his time that one of his best friends, Hsu Yun-Tsiao, who was a Southeast Asian historian and former editor of the *Journal of the South Sea Society* (henceforth *JSSS*) described Han in the following manner,

> [W]e know that there were so many millionaires in Southeast Asia with 'rags-to-riches' stories, but Mr. Han was the only person who became a famous scholar as well as a research advisor of a museum from a humble background as an autodidact-labourer with only a basic education (Hsu 1970b: 133).

It is, therefore, tenuous to categorize Han in the common analytical framework of Chinese immigrants overseas, because he appears to have contravened sociological stereotypes pertaining to social status, education and career within the context of the Southeast Asian-Chinese of his generation. His life, activities and writings thus deserve to be critically re-examined because they may reveal hitherto undiscovered insights into how certain overseas Chinese personalities straddled between their affiliations to the homeland and their commitment to the making of modern Singapore, as well as their attempts to interweave the study of Southeast Asian history with that of China.

It is noteworthy to point out that there have been a large number of writings on Han Wai Toon's life and his background that has been mined for this chapter. Much of the genre of biographical writing was based on Han's own accounts in his book and articles (refer to appendix 1) and recollections of his friends in Singapore and Malaysia, such as Hsu Yun-Tsiao, Lian Shisheng, Liu Zizheng, Ma Ge and Wu Tiren (Hsu 1962a, 1970a, 1970b; Lian 1951; Liu 1979; Ma 1962; Wu 1952, 1970). Hsu Yun-Tsiao's article provides the most comprehensive background information on Han, advocating the view that Han was also a famous scholar on Chinese trade ceramics. The second genre of sources is the correspondence between Han and his friends. For example, the correspondence between Hsu Yun-Tsiao and Han from 1962 to 1970, and Liu Zhizheng and Han in 1968 provide invaluable insights into Han's remaining years in Beijing (Lew and Chou 2006: 74-87, Liu 1979: 61-4). Xu Beihong's letters and paintings to Han, poems by Yu Dafu, Zheng Zhiyu and Hsu Yun-Tsiao reveal a close friendship between these men (Hsu 1947, 70, 1970a: 37; Xu 2008: 248-55; Zhou 1981: 214, 237; Zheng 1954: 36). To this must be added the biographies and articles written by Han's friends, namely, Xu Beihong, Yu Dafu, Hsu Yun-Tsiao and Tan Yeok Seong, which provide supplementary information on Han's life. More recently, Leander Seah's (2005: 13; 2007: 139-41) research on historicizing hybridity and the globalization of the South Seas Society has brought to light some important materials for

the analysis of Han's life and his hybrid identity within the context of him being one of the co-founders of the South Seas Society. A fourth source of information about Han is journalistic and popular depictions published in newspapers such as the *Hainan Daily* based on a conference held on 8 April 2008 in Hainan University entitled 'In Memoriam of Han Wai Toon [who] passed away thirty-eight years ago' (Cai 2008; Chen 2006). Other accounts in this genre were by his clansmen and relatives, Han Guangfeng and Han Tan Juan, as well as obituaries published in the *Sin Chew Jit Poh* upon Han's passing. Editorials notes and reports on the South Sea Society, the forewords contain useful information for the present study (Han 1989, 1990 and 2008). There are two articles written about Han's collection and contributions on specific topics, the first being Han's trade ceramics collection in Beijing Palace Museum by Wang Jianhua and the other one is about Han's research on Hainan stone artefacts by Prof. Tang Lingling (Wang 1988: 76-81, 90; Tang 2008: 305-9).

Negotiating Identities, Affiliations and Interests: The Many Lives of Han Wai Toon

Han's life can basically be divided into four stages. These are: 1) The Hainan Stage (1892-1915); 2) Initial Years in Southeast Asia (1915-1934); 3) Research in Ceramics (1934-1962); and 4) Back in Beijing (1962-1970). These will now be briefly examined.

Hainan Stage (1892-1915)

Han Wai Toon was born in Fengming Village in Hainan, China, in 1892. He attended Baodun and Weiwen School in Hainan and completed his basic education at the age of fourteen.

Han gained many gardening experiences at his father's farm during Hainan period. He mentioned that he planted different tropical fruit, for example coconut and lychee, for breeding test (Han 1946a: 46; 1953a: 28). In 1913, he was running a dye-processing workshop with friends. The business venture proved to be unsuccessful because he failed to test the chemicals regarding colour fading, while Western cloth inundated the local markets causing local cloth sales to plummet (Hsu 1970a: 37). But it actually helped Han to gain first-hand knowledge of chemicals and gardening for his future studies on Chinese ceramics and botany.

Two years later, Han's clan brother Han Yanyuan encouraged Han to embark on his first journey to Singapore to repay his debts. The dye-processing workshop was handed over to his brother, Han Zhizhun. Han Wai Toon probably came to learn about Singapore from his cousin

Han Juzhun. According to Hsu Yun-Tsiao's narration, Han could not find a job in Singapore in the beginning and his cousin Han Juzhun offered to give him money to come back to Hainan. However, Han told Juzhun he would not return before repaying his debts. Juzhun used his networking in Singapore to help Han find a job (Han 1989: 330; Hsu 1970a: 37).

Initial Years in Southeast Asia (1915-1934)

When Han first arrived in Singapore, he stayed in his uncle Wangyi's shop, the 'Silonghao', on Robinson Road. Juzhun helped him find a job in Kuala Bura on Karimun Island, Indonesia, as a rubber-tapper for a small company. At the same time, Han also worked as a clerk for the same company. Within two years, he had saved enough money to repay all the debts accrued during his dye-processing business in Hainan. A $200 surplus was used for a joint venture to establish the German Shennong Medical Hall, which dealt with chemicals and laboratory equipment (Han 1989: 330; Hsu 1970a: 37).

It was not by chance that Han became one of the shareholders and a staff member working for the German Shennong Medical Hall. He had some connections with the Hainan clan groups to support himself in Singapore and, at the same time, maintained regular correspondences with Hainan. The medical shop was first established in 1866 by some German businessmen but was confiscated by the British colonial government, which regarded it as 'enemy property' during the First World War. It was auctioned off in 1916 to some Hainanese merchants, among which was a qualified Chinese pharmacist from Singapore, Foo Khee How. Tellingly, this was the first Chinese business venture in the world of Western medicine and pharmaceutical products that were exported to Southeast Asia. Han worked as a dispenser in the Shennong Medical Hall and through this job he acquired a knowledge of chemistry and pharmacy as well as photography and film processing. Indeed, Han was fond of taking pictures of various sites in Singapore, personalizing these pictures in highly creative ways such as juxtaposing two pictures so that a person would suddenly be standing in front of a different landscape (Han 2008: 120-1). In 1933, a senior judge, J.V. Mills, visited the Medical Hall. He asked Han in Cantonese 'How do I translate *sumu* from a Chinese book into English?' to which Han replied 'logwood'. But Han felt that the Westerner was not fully satisfied with his simple response. Han then started reading up on a variety of subjects such as chemistry, medicine and the history of the Chinese-Southeast Asian relationship in his spare time. He saw the acquisition of this knowledge as a form of investment in the acquisition of a stable income and a long-term position at the Medical Hall. This

gave him a solid background upon which he was to build his research (Hsu 1970a: 37).

Research in Ceramics (1934-1962)

In 1934, when Han was passing through a second-hand market, he discovered a finely decorated Chinese porcelain dish. He spent $3 to buy this dish and wanted to know its provenance. He believed that Chinese ceramics found in Southeast Asia demonstrated that early contacts existed between China and Southeast Asia. The encounter with the piece of porcelain compelled Han to read as many books and Chinese texts as he could, especially historical documents about Chinese trade ceramics. He began to notice the great variety of Chinese trade ceramics that existed in Southeast Asia and embarked on creating his own personal collection. To this end, he invented a scientific way to examine the age of ancient ceramics based on the chemical reactions of the colour of glaze and body. His research on Chinese trade ceramics occupied much of his daily routine from 1934 onwards (Han 1989: 311; Hsu 1970a: 37).

In 1936, Han spent $700 to buy a piece of land along Upper Thomson Road to build a garden, which he named 'Silly Fun Garden (*Yuquyuan*)'. Besides ensuring that different breeds of *rambutan* were planted, the garden became an outdoor exhibition hall and meeting place, where he displayed a wide collection of Chinese trade ceramics and books to his friends and visitors from all over the world. His guests would witness his enthusiasm for Chinese trade ceramics studies and love of tropical fruits (Lian 1951: 8; Sullivan 1960). On 30 July 1955, Han hosted a South Seas Society seminar at the Silly Fun Garden. Graced by more than 60 guests, his close friend, Lian Shisheng, spoke on aspects of Vietnamese Customs. (Hsu 1955: 59). During his four-day journey to Singapore in the early 1950s, an archaeologist from Cambridge University, Prof. Cheng Te-K'un, through Tan Yeok Seong's recommendation, went to visit Han's garden. He mentioned that, 'No one who is interested in the cultures of the South Seas will [want to] miss the enthusiastic collector and scholar who builds his study in a grove of *rambutan* in Upper Thompson Road ... Mr. Han has a very good collection of export wares and potsherds found in various parts of Malaya' (Cheng 1951: 9). Silly Fun Garden was also one of the caches where the works of a famous Chinese artist, Xu Beihong, were hidden during the Japanese Occupation. In a correspondence between Xu Beihong and Han, mention was made of Han's role in ensuring the safety of Xu's artefacts. Xu gave repeated instructions on the proper way to pack ceramic pieces and artworks. After the Japanese surrendered, Han returned all of the objects he had hidden to Xu's student, Chen Xiaonan

(Ouyang 2008: 57-8; Xu 2008: 250-5). More than anything else, the epi-
sode reflects the close friendship between the men, who had a common
interest in ceramics.

Han was one of the founders and pioneer members of the South
Seas Society, which was established on 17 March 1940. Why did Han
become the pioneer member of the South Sea Society? In 1938, Hsu
Yun-Tsiao was working as an editor at *Sin Chew Jit Poh*. Han went to
meet him in his newspaper office upon his return from Thailand. They
became friends and Hsu often accompanied his colleagues Zhang Li-
qian, Yao Nan, Yu Dafu and Guan Chupu to visit Han and have intellec-
tual exchanges together in Silly Fun Garden (Hsu 1970a: 38). The core
group of the South Sea Society gradually formed. After fellow founder
Guan Chupu left the society in July of that same year, Han subsequently
took over Guan's positions as councillor and treasurer, which he held
for more than ten years. In 1956, he was elected vice-chairman of the
society. Han was also very active in another scholarly organization –
China Society of Singapore – that from 1949 onwards began publishing
Han's articles in its annual journal (see Appendix 1). Han also hoped to
become a member of the Oriental Ceramics Society (henceforth OCS)
in London, for this would provide him with the recognition he desired
from Western scholars. However, there were no OCS members in
Southeast Asia who could recommend him to the prestigious society.
Finally, the curator of the Raffles Museum and one of the invited Wes-
tern scholarly members of the South Seas Society, Mr. M.W.F. Tweedie,
recommended him in 1952. His involvement in OCS activities was
highly appreciated by the honourable secretary Lt. Col. Cage Brown
who often encouraged ceramics researchers and collectors to visit Han
at Silly Fun Garden (Hsu 1970a: 38).

According to Leander Seah, one of the benefits that emerged from
Han's membership in the OCS was that the South Seas Society forged
new contacts and cultivated strong linkages with the Western colonial
scholarly communities especially those from the Malayan Branch of the
Royal Asiatic Society (henceforth MBRAS). MBRAS aimed at steering
its research more towards 'Southeast Asian' rather than 'Chinese' influ-
ences and thus saw the advantages of working with Han on the 'arte-
fact-based' nature of Chinese trade ceramics studies (Seah 2005: 37-9).
Concomitantly, Han had to visit different museums and collectors in
Southeast Asia to compare his collections with those of other research-
ers. He was subsequently acknowledged as one of the most knowledge-
able scholars on Chinese trade ceramics in Southeast Asia at that time
(Pope 1956: 71). Han's interaction with Western colonial scholars soon
found its way into many of his writings of the period. For example, in
an article entitled 'Chinese Ceramics Shards with Inscriptions found
from Johore Lama River District', Han conducted a comparative study

between his collection of Chinese Ming porcelain shards, the shards from Raffles Museum, National Museum in Kuala Lumpur, and those in the collections of Tony Beamish and S. Oliveiro (Han 1953b: 21-2). MBRAS and the South Seas Society members, H.D. Collings and M.W. F. Tweedie of the Raffles Museum helped Han compare the stone tools from Hainan and the Raffles Museum. Later, M.W.F. Tweedie wrote a short article on Han's Hainan stone artefacts, which was published in *JSSS* (Han 1951d: 10-1; Tweedie 1951: 9). Although Han had made many intellectual exchanges with other Western colonial scholars, Mainland Chinese celebrities and Southeast Asian-Chinese academic circles, it is pertinent to highlight here that he could speak neither English nor Mandarin (Hsu 1970a: 38, Ouyang 1999: 39-40). Here, the contributions of expert translators from the South Seas Society proved crucial. Several of Han's articles were promptly translated into English and related articles by Western scholars were translated into Chinese. *JSSS* thus became a platform for the conversation between Han and Western scholars (Braddell 1950b; Han 1948e).

Throughout this period, Han maintained his role as a Chinese businessman whose goal was to amass as much wealth in Southeast Asia as possible (Han 1946b: 10). He withdrew his shares from the German Shennong Medical Hall and set up the Sino Chemical Company with He Hanguang during the Japanese Occupation of Singapore. In September 1956, the Chinese Communist Party convened the Eighth National Congress in Beijing. It held a discussion on the strategy of uniting and mobilizing repatriated overseas Chinese (*Guiguo huaqiao*) to join the socialist party (Mao and Lin 1993: 79). Han received an invitation from Guo Moruo, the senior research fellow of the Science Institute of China, to become a research consultant and live in China.[1] Guo's letter may have encouraged Han's return to China; however, it was not the most crucial factor. Indeed, Han had for a long time desired to return to China. In a report on the South Seas Society committee meeting of 24 December 1949, it mentioned that Han was planning to return to China and he would be temporarily passing his duties as treasurer on to Lin Woling (Hsu 1950a: 96). After the establishment of the new Chinese government in 1949, Han returned to China again in 1950 to visit his mother and conduct research in Guangzhou and Hainan (Lew and Chou 2006; 75). In 1958, Han gave all of his shares of one of his companies to his eldest son, Qifeng, at a time when the company was reaping healthy profits. Two years later, he withdrew his shares from the Sino Chemical Company to support his other two sons, Yuefeng and Kunfeng, who were pursuing their studies in Beijing and Shanghai (Hsu 1970a: 39).

Han chose to return to China with his second wife Wuxu, his youngest son Xiongfeng and his daughter Yaying on 17 March 1962 (Hsu

1962b). One reason is that it was comparatively difficult for historians and Chinese ceramics researchers based in Southeast Asia to get access to books and Chinese texts if they were not based in China. The other reason was that Han wanted to conduct research trips to different Chinese ceramic kiln sites to compare the ceramic materials he had found in Southeast Asia (Hsu 1962a, Sin Chew Jit Poh report 1962). A third plausible reason was Han's loyalty to his hometown, which grew through the years as he collected hundreds of ceramic shards at various Southeast Asian sites, such as Johore Lama, as well as Chinese ceramics bought from various dealers, including about 315 intact pieces during the 47 years he spent in Southeast Asia. Eventually, on seven different occasions between 1956 and 1962, Han donated parts of his large collection, including the 315 Chinese ceramic pieces, to the Beijing Palace Museum (Cai 2008; Wang 1988: 76).

Back in Beijing (1962-1970)

In the year before he died, Han was appointed research advisor of the ceramics division in the Beijing Palace Museum and research fellow at the National Culture and History Council. In the 1960s, many overseas Chinese who returned to China were labelled as 'bourgeois' or as having 'Overseas relationships' by the Communists, and were discriminated against or placed under surveillance by the locals. 'Overseas relationships' sometimes served as the pretext for political persecution, especially during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) (Mao and Lin 1993: 92).

But it was very different for Han, who, although he was labelled an 'overseas Chinese returnee', was treated humanely during his stay in Beijing. In his letters from Beijing to Liu Zizheng and Hsu Yun-Tsiao, Han stressed that he was enjoying his life in Beijing and that his rheumatism had been cured without taking any medicine in part because of the dry climate (Lew and Chou 2006: 76). Han also wrote that he was spending most of his time studying and copying research materials in the libraries. He had the rare opportunity to go on a research trip with his son Kunfeng to various parts of Nanjing, Shanghai and Hangzhou in 1962, and also visited Hainan two years later. During his field trip, he met with several Mainland Chinese artists and scholars, such as Liu Haisu, Gao Shiheng and Su Jiqing (Gao and Su joined the South Seas Society in 1948). More interestingly, Han maintained regular correspondences with Hsu Yun-Tsiao and Liu Zizheng who were based in Southeast Asia during the Cultural Revolution (Han 1965; Hsu 1948: 53, 1970a: 39; Lew and Chou 2006: 77-9; Liu 1979: 62).

There is, however, very limited information about Han's activities in Beijing. Nonetheless, from the sources that are currently available, it is

more than clear that the political movements in Beijing had disrupted Han's original research plans and also his views on China. Han had earlier planned to publish one book on the history of Chinese ceramics and another collection of his research articles, but neither was ever published (Han 1960a: 56; Hsu 1970a: 41). Additionally, Han had only published one article during his eight years in China, which was in stark contrast to his productive years in Singapore (Han 1965). Perhaps the last sentence in Han's letter to Hsu dated 18 February 1965 provides us with a partial reason: 'I am very busy, so I cannot correspond with you and other friends for long periods of time. I hope you will forgive (me)'. Han's next letter to Hsu was sent almost two years later – 27 July 1967. In 1968, Han, in a letter inviting Hsu and Wu Tiren to visit China, he wrote, 'In China, great advances have been made in science, a scholar no longer prides himself on his individual narrow mindset. What is now in place is a "collective thinking"' (Lew and Chou 2006: 80-1).

On 2 October, 1970, Han died of stomach cancer in Beijing. He was cremated after a memorial ceremony organized by the Beijing Palace Museum. Han's ashes were buried in Hainan, in the village where he was born (Hsu 1970a: 41). Several years later, the Beijing Palace Museum honoured him along with two other famous Chinese ceramics senior fellows – archaeologist Chen Wanli and connoisseur Sun Yinzhou. They were named the 'Three Unusual Scholars'.[2] We can pretty much assume that 1965 was the watershed of Han's life in Beijing. Before the Cultural Revolution, Han had more freedom to do his research, travel around in China and correspond with his overseas friends. Beginning in the latter half of 1965, Han apparently became involved in various political movements until his death in 1970. A clear picture of these last few years of his life will only emerge with the release of more of Han's private papers in the future.

Han's Research Interests and Scholarly Contributions

Han published one monograph and no fewer than 55 articles in various journals and newspapers, including *JSSS, Annual of the China Society of Singapore, Central Plain Monthly, Oriental Magazine, South Seas Digest, Sin Chew Weekly, South Seas Magazine, Saturday Review, Sin Chew Jit Poh, Sin Chew Jit Poh Semi-Monthly, Journal of Associated Chambers of Qiongzhou Clan Association in the British Malaya, Kwong Wah Jit Poh* and *Culture Relics* (refer to appendix 1). *JSSS* has 16 of Han's Chinese papers, while the *Annual of the China Society of Singapore* and *Saturday Review* contain nine and seven articles respectively. Most of his articles were published in *JSSS*, possibly because Han was one of the founders

and councillors in the South Seas Society. It should be noted that after the internal strife between Hsu Yun-Tsiao and fellow society member Tan Yeok Seong in 1958, Han stopped submitting articles to the *JSSS* and he resigned from the South Seas Society Committee (Hsu 1970a: 38; Seah 2005: 45-6). Most of his articles were submitted to other journals or Chinese newspapers published in Singapore, some of which were translated into English by South Seas Society members like Liu Chiang or Lü Ch'eng-cheng(Han 1948e, 1948f, 1951i).

Han's articles and books can be classified into six subjects:

1. Chinese trade ceramics: in particular Ming-Ching ware, found in Johore Lama, Indonesia and Borneo and a knowledge of ancient Chinese ceramics chemical techniques;
2. Plantations and various products of Southeast Asia, including *lac*, Bornean camphor, *sappan* wood, downy myrtle, pineapple, black pepper, *rambutan,* coconut and *durian,* etc. for which he established the historical relationship between China and Southeast Asia;
3. Chinese gods of Southeast Asia; his articles mainly focus on debates over the names and origins *Tuapekong,* as well as one paper on *Tien Hao*;
4. Southeast Asian history and monuments: the debates regarding the location of 'Longyamen', Zheng He's non-Chinese descent, ancient cannons discovered in Singapore and the ancient routes between China and Southeast Asia;
5. Chinese history and monuments, including studies of the stone tools and Chinese inscriptions from Hainan, and international relations between China and other states in Asia;
6. Han's collections, including his studies of the function of an ancient Persian 'spittoon' that he bought in a shop during the Japanese Occupation and a Wei Dynasty ceramic vessel with a protective talisman.

In short, Han's research interests were focused on the historical relationship between China and Southeast Asia. Some topics were duplicated in different journals, for example the origin of the South Chinese deity *Tuapekong* and the function of an ancient Persian spittoon. Han wanted to use some new evidence to support his arguments, but his arguments usually prompted disagreements with other scholars (Cheng 1948: 15; Gao 2002: 315; Hsu 1951: 6; Tian 1963: 25). His debate on the historical location of 'Longyamen' is a typical example of these academic disputes (Han 1948b, 1961; Kwa 2004: 126-7; Lin 1999: 39, 42-3). According to Ling Woling's detailed literature review of the 'Longyamen' study, Southeast Asian historical geography researcher, W.P. Groeneveldt was the first scholar who studied this topic in 1887 (Lin 1999: 28). The debate was discussed again during the first South Seas Society

field trip to Pulau Tekong and Johore Lama, organised by Hsu Yun-Tsiao and Han on 6 June 1948. Besides Hsu and Han, Liu Chiang, Zhang Shoushi, Lin Woling, Guang Chongren, H.D. Collings and seven others went along on the trip (Hsu 1948b: 77). After the trip, Han wrote the article 'A Study on Johore Lama', which, along with Hsu Yun-Tsiao's article 'Notes on Malay Peninsula in Ancient Voyages', was published in the 1948 issue of the *JSSS* (Han 1948b; Hsu 1948a). It aroused scholarly interest in the topic, including amongst the chairman of MBRAS, Dato Roland Braddell, director of Malay States Museum, W. Linehan, Dato Douglas, Colling, H.D., Paul Wheatley, Hsu Yun-Tsiao, Su Jiqing, Lin Woling and others (Braddell 1950a; Colling 1948: 35; Hsu 1950b: 14; Lin 1999: 39 and 42-3; Wheatley 1961: 157). On 21 May, 1955, an open debate between Hsu and Han entitled 'Does Temasek mean Singapore?' was held at the Book Wholesaling Association with more than 20 scholars witnessing this exciting discussion. Though Han may have been wrong, the academic discussion was successfully maintained.

Han's main research strengths remained primarily in the fields of Chinese trade ceramics, and the plantations and products of Southeast Asia. Han investigated many archaeological sites and studied unearthed artefacts, although he admitted he was not an archaeologist (Han 1948: 14). Several weeks or months of research were conducted at Hainan, Guangzhou, Jakarta, Borneo and Johore Lama. These trips gave him first-hand experience in identifying Chinese ceramics and other artefacts and provided background to the customs and historical relationship between Southeast Asia and China (Han 1951d, 1952b, 1952c, 1952d, 1953b, 1955a). His scholarship on Chinese trade ceramics was mainly based on his private collection, artefacts kept or sold by Malay dealers in Padang as well as museum collections (Han 1965: 57; Wang 1988: 76). Unlike dealers or collectors who focus mainly on the outward appearance of Chinese ceramics, Han was keen to study the chemical reactions of the glazes and the clay in order to date and determine their provenances. This research method was very innovative in the Chinese ceramics circles of the time (Hsu 1970a: 37). His work reflects his attentiveness to Chinese historical sources and this created the necessary conditions for Western collectors and curators who visited Southeast Asia to appreciate him as an emerging scholar and member of their circle (Pope 1956: 71; Sullivan 1960).

At the same time, Han's passion and his studies evoked his friends' and other scholars' interest in Chinese ceramics and artefacts studies. Han mentioned that he often reported Western ceramics collectors activities to Lin Huixiang and Tan Yeok Seong, whereupon Tan, encouraged by Han, would then try to collect ceramic pieces (Han 1955b: 39). Within the South Seas Society fraternity, Hsu Yun-Tsiao, Tan Yeok

Seong and Zheng Ziyu, Liu Zizheng pursued some uncharted aspects of Han's research (Mao 2007: 79-80; Liu 1979: 61-5). Another case in point was the Contributions of L' Ecole Française D'Extrême-Orient exhibition held in 1952. One of the South Seas Society members noted that,

> Recently there was the most important but also the loneliest exhibition held in Singapore. I say lonely, because during the opening at Victoria Hall on 8 July at 5 p.m. the audiences included only Mr. Han Wai Toon, Mr. Hsu Yun-Tsiao, Mr. Tan Yeok Seong, Mr. Ling Woling and a few others. There was a discussion of archaeology held in Westerner Youth Club at 8 p.m. Besides some French ladies and gentlemen, the Chinese who attended [the discussion] comprised only Mr. Han Wai Toon and a few others. The Chinese are famous for watching the fun, but the general public did not pay any attention to this exhibition opening. Now you understand how this exhibition has been left out in the cold (Liang 1952: 1).

In Lian's description, Han appears as the probable initiator of the exhibition, as well as of the study of Chinese ceramics in Southeast Asia in general. According to Lian, Han was actively researching and trying to understand the new scholarship that was emerging from Western and Southeast Asian academic circles.

Undoubtedly, Han was one of the first in Singapore and on Mainland China to contribute to our knowledge of the historical importance of Chinese trade ceramics. His impact on Chinese trade ceramics studies in Southeast Asia became much more widely recognized and aroused an interest and awareness of Chinese ceramics found in Southeast Asia amongst the growing number of collectors and researchers interested in the field (Sullivan 1960). Han's book *Ancient Chinese Export Ceramics Inherited by Southeast Asia* made an important contribution to the knowledge of Chinese trade ceramics, and served as the first introductory study on Chinese ceramics in Southeast Asia written in Chinese. This despite the difficulties experienced by most Chinese scholars who tried to investigate and study the Chinese trade ceramics outside China before the 1990s. His book is now quite often cited by Chinese researchers in Chinese trade ceramics studies articles.

Conclusion

The above outline of Han Wai Toon's life serves as a reminder that the oversimplification of the study of the overseas Chinese, based on social status, education and career, should be avoided. Personal choice, influenced by an idealised image of a Chinese homeland, was a major factor that led Han to pursue his autodidactic academic career, and to eventually return to Mainland China. In Han's view, returning home to China was the best way for him to fulfil the dream encapsulated by the Chinese proverb 'fallen leaves returning to their roots'. Like other overseas Chinese, Han remained loyal to his native land and always had the desire to return to it one day. It suggests that Han had strong Sino-centric views in his studies on Chinese trade ceramics. In fact, Chinese trade ceramics can also be a source of information for the study of the developments of Southeast Asia's societies, rather than solely as a source for the drawing of the picture of the relationship between China and Southeast Asia, facilitated by Chinese merchants and migrants. Chinese trade ceramics could be employed by Southeast Asian societies as a way to rediscover and explain their ethnic identities (Miksic 2000: 194-5). Although Han remained entrenched in the belief that Chinese trade ceramics were one of the important heritage and ethnographic sources of Chinese culture, he did consider Chinese trade ceramics an important source for the understanding of Southeast Asian societies. For instance, Han went to Lawas to visit the Maruts tribe in Borneo to conduct an in-depth study on the relationships between ethnic groups and the customs and uses of Chinese pottery jars (Han 1955a).

Second, Han had a very strong sense of belonging to China after joining various Southeast Asian-Chinese academic organizations in Singapore, such as the South Seas Society. He also had some connections with Chinese clan associations. For example, Han was elected councillor of the Singapore Han Clan Temple in 1947, and his clan relatives revealed that they had such a close relationship with Han that they were often invited to join Han's *rambutan* eating parties (Han 1990: 16; Singapore Han Clan Temple 1970: 2). Nonetheless, it seems that the clan associations did not have a stronger hold on Han than the South Seas Society. One major piece of evidence is that most of his close friends were well-educated, Southeast Asian-Chinese scholars, or celebrities from Mainland China who were linked to the academic organizations that he had joined, including Yu Dafu, Hsu Yun-Tsiao, Xu Beihong, Guang Chupu, Liu Haisu and Lin Huixiang. The influence of these scholars led Han to opt for an academic career and the newspapers and journals that they edited provided him opportunities to publish his articles. In 1938, for instance, Han was encouraged by his friend Lin Huixing, a professor of the Department of Anthropology, Xiamen University,

to publish his first article on Chinese ceramics in the *Sin Chew Jit Poh* semi-monthly edited by Yu Dafu (Han 1938a, 1938b).

The other factor is the historical and geo-political settings surrounding Han's life that influenced his understanding of his identity and how he presented himself as a Chinese in Southeast Asia. He always used 'our country' instead of 'China' in his articles because he believed that the Chinese cultural centre was located in Mainland China. Sometimes he called himself '*Tangshan abo*' (Chinese uncle) rather than Chinese because 'although a Chinese uncle might be far from his Chinese homeland, he can always find comfort spiritually by buying and studying different Chinese local products (Han 1954b: 69-70)'. When he was in Guangzhou, he claimed he was a '*Nanyang bo*' (Southeast Asian uncle) because he said he was in an unfamiliar environment (Han 1952c: 3). These two identities became reversed in China and Southeast Asia and reflected Han's anxiety regarding his different identities in these geo-political settings. But Han finally made up his mind: he was the only founding member of the South Seas Society of Chinese origin who actually returned to China after the independence of Malaya and the enforcement of the Citizenship Ordinance in Malaya in 1957 (Seah 2005: 31-7,52). Changes in the historical and geo-political settings in Singapore and Malaysia did not undermine Han's loyalty toward China, or his Chinese identity in relation to China. In other words, Han rather saw himself as an Overseas Chinese or '*huaqiao*', than a Chinese Overseas or '*haiwai huaren*' (Han 1946b: 10).

Appendix 1: Han Wai Toon's Publications

1938

a. 'Zhongguo guci zai Nanyang zhi yiliu' (Ancient Chinese Wares Found in Southeast Asia). *Sin Chew Jit Poh Semi-Monthly* 5: 8-11.
b. 'Woguo ciyou zhi qiyuan' (The Origins of Chinese Ceramics Glazes). *Sin Chew Jit Poh Semi-Monthly* 9: 9-10.

1939

a. 'Dabogong zhi yanjiu' (Study of the 'Tuapekong'). *Sin Chew Jit Poh,* December 9, p. 8.
b. 'Woguo guci youzhi ji secai zhi lice yi' (A Preliminary Study of Ancient Chinese Ceramics Glazes and Colours I). *Sin Chew Jit Poh Semi-Monthly* 14: 11-2.
c. 'Woguo guci youzhi ji secai zhi lice er' (A Preliminary Study of Ancient Chinese Ceramics Glazes and Colours II). *Sin Chew Jit Poh Semi-Monthly* 15: 8-11.

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Notes

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2   Interview with Han Tan Juan on 23 April 2007.
3   Personal communication with Mr. Wang Guanrao on 10 April 2007.

9   Singaporean First: Challenging the Concept of Transnational Malay Masculinity

Lenore Lyons and Michele Ford

Introduction

Since Singapore's independence in 1965, the People's Action Party's (henceforth the PAP) management of ethnicity and potential ethnic conflict has depended on a strategy that emphasizes selected 'race' identities.[1] Under a policy of multiracialism, all Singaporeans fall into one of four official race categories – Chinese, Malay, Indian, and Others. This policy, known as 'CMIO multiracialism', goes much further than simply providing an environment in which cultural and religious practices are observed and upheld. It downplays diversity within racial categories and emphasizes shared cultural and linguistic heritages within racial groups. In the process, race becomes an important way of labelling the population and individuals are encouraged to think about themselves using these racial categories. CMIO multiracialism relies for its legitimacy upon the imagery of an ever-present threat to national stability from inter-ethnic conflict. It is thus promoted as a pragmatic solution to the realities of nation building. The policy was developed in a context of concern about the promotion of Malay privilege under the leadership of the United Malays National Organization (UMNO), in the short-lived Federation of Malaysia of which Singapore was a part from 1963 to 1965. During this period, the PAP promoted the concept of a 'Malaysian Malaysia' in which all races were given equal rights, against a 'Malay Malaysia' in which Malays (as *bumiputera*, literally 'sons of the soil') would be privileged above other ethnic groups (Lian and Rajah 2002). In contrast to UMNO's policies, the PAP sought to 'correct the imbalance in economic and social development' between the Malay and non-Malay communities through a focus on education (Lee Kuan Yew, cited in Bedlington 1981: 248-9). This view of racial equality continued after Singapore was ousted from the Federation and formed the basis of the idea of a 'Singaporean Singapore'.

However, in reality, not all races are equally valued for their contribution to the Singaporean national identity. The rhetoric of a 'Singaporean Singapore' contains an implicit, frequently aggressive, program of as-

similation of racial minorities into a Chinese-dominated society. Singa-pore's economic success in the post-independence period is routinely attributed to aspects of Chinese culture, often presented under the rub-ric of 'Asian values', such as thrift, hard work, and a desire for educa-tion. Members of minority races are expected to maintain a sense of ra-cial/cultural separateness, as expressed through markers such as diet, dress, religion and language, while jettisoning those aspects of culture that do not meet the desired attributes of the national identity (Barr and Low 2005: 167). Within this framework, Malays are encouraged to as-similate into Singaporean society in public, while reserving their Malay, and especially Muslim, identities for the private sphere.[2] Significantly, the state's rendering of a homogenous Malay racial category serves not only to set them apart from the Chinese majority population, and by implication, a Chinese-determined national identity, but also to identify their cultural inferiority. In contrast to the Chinese, Malays are said to lack the key cultural attributes that would enable them to succeed in the modern global economy (Rahim 1998). This cultural deficit is used to explain the Malay community's continuing economic and social disad-vantage when compared to other racial groups (see Kamaludeen 2007; Li 1989; Rahim 1998).

When stereotypes about Malay cultural inferiority are combined with widespread concerns about the existence of a Pan-Malay (read Muslim) brotherhood, the Malay community's loyalty to the Singapore nation may sometimes be questioned. Former Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew articulated these sentiments in 1987 when he referred to concerns about Malay/Muslim loyalty: 'Are we sure that in a moment of crisis, when the heat is on, we are all together, heart to heart?' (Siddique 1989: 570). These concerns imply the innate perception amongst pro-minent politicians that there exists a trans-national cultural/religious identity shared by Singaporean Malays, Malaysian Malays and Indone-sians that overshadows a sense of Singaporean nationalism – senti-ments summed up by then Second Minister of Defence (and current Prime Minister) Lee Hsien Loong during a constituency tour in 1987:

> If there is a conflict, we don't want to put any of our soldiers in a difficult position where his emotions for the nation may be in conflict with his emotions for his religion... We don't want to put anybody in that position where he feels he is not fighting a just cause, and perhaps worse, maybe his side is not the right side (*The Straits Times* 1987).[3]

Fears concerning Singaporean Malays' divided loyalties have become even more apparent in the post-9/11 environment. During the 1980s, the state, Malay civil society groups, and Muslim organizations actively

promoted Islam as a means to counter a range of social problems facing the Malay community. In the post-9/11 period, however, the value of Islam as a form of 'cultural ballast' has come under intense scrutiny. Instead, it has been positioned as a potential threat to nationalism. In January 2003, the government issued a White Paper, 'The *Jemaah Islamiyah* Arrests and the Threat of Terrorism' that included an examination of a 'home-grown' terrorist threat. In both parliamentary and public debates about the White Paper, the broader issue of threats posed by international terrorism to Singapore has been sidelined by a focus on race relations and a concern that Southeast Asian Muslims in general, and Singaporean Malays in particular, are susceptible to a radical view of Islam terrorism that places religion above national loyalty (Ismail and Shaw 2006; Kadir 2006). This focus on Islam as a marker of potential disloyalty points to the ongoing conflation of racial and religious identities, as evident in the collective term 'Malay-Muslim' commonly used as a racial category by the government, community leaders and the press.

This chapter calls into question ideas about the existence of a transnational Malay-Muslim identity by examining the ways in which Malay men understand and perform their masculinity vis-à-vis men in the neighbouring countries of Malaysia and Indonesia. It starts from the premise that issues of ethnic (and religious) 'loyalty' are questions that rest on primordial notions of 'self' and 'other' attributed to ethnicity and religion. We argue that, in the context of Singapore, concepts of ethnic and national identity are shaped by two significant forces: the presence of the Chinese majority population, and the PAP's stance on Singapore's location in a Malay/Muslim archipelago (Brown 1994; Hill and Lian 1995). The Chinese majority population and the Chinese-dominated parliament and bureaucracy play a critical role in shaping Malay identity not through a process of hybridisation that arises through direct contact and interaction, but through a state-led policy of comparison that requires the Malay community to constantly position itself in relation to the majority (Li 1989: 136). At the same time, given the heterogeneity of the Malay community (a fact eluded to in public statements about 'Malay loyalty'), any investigation into the meaning of a shared Malay identity also needs to consider to what extent 'Malayness' is constituted as 'a Singaporean experience, and to what extent this experience has itself been conditioned by geographical proximity to Malaysia and cultural affinities with other related communities in Malaysia, the Riau archipelago, and Indonesia' (Lian and Rajah 2002: 232).[4] By examining how Singaporean Malay men negotiate and construct their identities, this paper both problematises the notion of a homogenous Malay identity in Singapore and seeks to subvert commonly held understandings about the presence of a transnational Malay masculinity in the region.[5]

In the first part of this study, we explore these men's accounts of Malay marginalisation and issues of racial discrimination. The second part of the study will discuss cross-border travel and the construction of masculinities across borders. We argue that the ways in which young professional Malay men understand and respond to racial discrimination reflects their internalisation of a set of state-sponsored values commonly ascribed to the Chinese community, but which are also increasingly defined as essential elements of Singapore's national identity. These values come into sharper focus in the way that these men talk about their experiences of travel to Indonesia and Malaysia. In their accounts of 'Malaysian-Malay backwardness' and 'Indonesian corruption', the men assert their own national superiority as Singaporeans, and downplay any sense of shared ethnic identity. In a global context where Muslim masculinity has been positioned as inherently threatening, and in a local context where Malay (Muslim) masculinity is always already problematic, our analysis contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the ways class and ethnicity intersect in shaping Singaporean Malay men's sense of identity.

Our discussion draws on data collected in interviews with Singaporean Malay men in the middle- and lower-income brackets over a four-year period to 2008. The interviews were conducted as part of a larger study on the construction of national and ethnic identity in the Indonesia-Malaysia-Singapore Growth Triangle.[6] For the purposes of this paper we concentrate primarily on our interviews with professional men aged between 25 and 34. It is important to note that the ways in which these Malay men talk about their identities is coloured by the lens of class. These men are experiencing rapid social mobility in Singapore and the majority espouse a distinctly 'middle-income' outlook in terms of their aspirations and perceptions of their social and economic opportunities. At the same time, it is not possible to describe their class position solely as 'middle-income', since this label obscures the complex nature of inter-generational differences in education and income levels within Singaporean households. Their parents are employed in the service and manufacturing sectors, but these men have benefited from higher levels of education (including access to university) and subsequently higher wages. However, like most unmarried Singaporeans, they continue to live with their parents and siblings until they are married. Household income and residential structure are thus poor measures of their class location. Although these men represent less than 8 per cent of the Malay population of Singapore (Leow 2001), their status as potential community leaders makes them a significant group in the eyes of the state. By focusing on middle-income professional men, we can also explore the nexus between class and ethnicity in the construction of Malay masculinities.

Understanding Malay Marginality

Malay marginality is a constant trope in the narratives that the Malay men in this study construct about what it means to 'be a man' in contemporary Singapore. These narratives draw on state-sponsored research that highlights the Malay community's disadvantage when compared to other racial groups. This relative disadvantage is measured in economic and social terms. Chinese households consistently out-perform Malay households in relation to household income and the margin has continued to grow. In 1980, the average Malay household income was 73 per cent of the Chinese household income, but by 2000, had dropped to only 60 per cent of the Chinese household income (Lee 2004: 32). Importantly, these figures do not take into consideration significant class differences within the Chinese community and the presence of significant numbers of Chinese households on low incomes. Thus the focus on 'Malay marginality' serves to obscure class divisions within Singapore, and forefronts race as a causal factor in economic and social disadvantage. Attention is primarily placed on Malays as a homogenous racial category in opposition to an undifferentiated, homogeneous 'Chinese' community.

This form of analysis is supported by data that highlights broad racial differences in socio-economic performance. According to the 2000 Census, over 30 per cent of working Malays were found in the manufacturing sector and were over-represented in manufacturing, transportation, business and social services industries compared with Indians and Chinese (Lee 2004: 33). By contrast, the Chinese dominate in professional, managerial and technical occupations. Educational differences play an important role in creating these occupational disparities between the Chinese and other ethnic groups (Rahim 1998).[7] In comparison with the Chinese and Indian populations, Malays also experience higher divorce rates, larger numbers of single parents, larger family sizes, and are over-represented in drug offences, truancy, and un-wed teenage pregnancies (Mutalib 2005). These 'social problems' attract considerable government and public attention and serve to reinforce a series of negative stereotypes about the Malay community. In an attempt to redress these problems, the government supports a number of 'social uplifting' initiatives. Many of these programs are run through the Malay/Muslim community self-help organizations that provide education and training support for Malay children and lower-income workers, as well as life-skills and marriage preparation workshops.

The PAP has always been careful to assert that Malays occupy a special status within Singapore as the indigenous people of the island nation. This special status is officially recognized in Article 89 of the Singapore Constitution:

> The government shall exercise its functions in such a manner as to recognize the special position of the Malays, who are indigenous people of Singapore, and accordingly it shall be the responsibility of the government to protect, safeguard, support, foster and promote their political, economic, social and cultural identity and the Malay language (cited in Mutalib 2005: 57-8).

Among the 'privileges' granted to Malays was the recognition of Malay as the 'national' language (with Mandarin, Tamil and English identified as the other three 'official' languages); free education from primary school to university; the provision of a mosque in every HDB estate; and the appointment of Minister-in-charge of Muslim Affairs in the Cabinet. These constitutional provisions are mainly symbolic. In practical terms, the symbolism of Malays' special status means little in the face of the Malay community's marginality vis-à-vis other groups, particularly since Singapore Malays no longer enjoy the special quotas and other forms of governmental support originally identified at the time of Independence (Mutalib 2005: 70). For example, Malay and Muslim families contribute to Mendaki programs that support a range of activities, including the payment of tertiary educational fees. Consequently, while tertiary education remains symbolically free for the community as a whole, it is not automatically a right for individual students and their families.

The PAP government recognizes that the Malay community still lags behind other ethnic groups on a range of key socio-economic indicators, but asserts that a state-sponsored policy of meritocracy ensures that anyone can succeed based on merit and not racial background (Mutalib 2005).[8] While these claims are certainly supported by countless examples of working class individuals who 'work hard' and succeed, such statements overlook the extent to which hard work is frequently culturally inscribed. Writing in the 1980s, Tania Li (1989: 167) observed that:

> the image of Malays as perennially backward, or reified cultural explanations for Malay backwardness, cannot be dismissed as merely false. The image of backwardness and its supposed cultural causes have themselves become part of the cultural fabric of Malay and Singapore society, and they have real practical effects as they are incorporated into the daily lives of ordinary Singaporeans and into national political processes.

Although Tania Murray Li's study is now several decades old, it provides one of the few detailed ethnographic accounts of the Malay community. Her comments are thus important for historicising the formation of

'marginality' as both a policy imperative and a socially inscribed trait. Lily Rahim's (1998) study of Malay marginality, published a decade after Li's book, is also insightful in its demonstration of the way that the discourse of backwardness has been taken up at the policy level. These and other studies show that Malay marginalization is attributed by both the state and community members themselves to entrenched cultural values which hold Malays back from taking advantage of the education and employment opportunities provided under PAP rule. Malay men are said to lack intellectual capacity and motivation, and to be better with their hands (physical and technical skills) and less capable in academic areas (Rahim 1998). This is combined with a cultural propensity to be 'laid back' and not interested in hard work, which echoes the 'lazy native' thesis proposed by colonial authorities, who described Malay men as effeminate and unsuited to waged labour (Crinis 2004).[9]

These stereotypes reflect a widely held view in the non-Malay community that Malay men lack the key cultural and biological attributes that would enable them to succeed in the modern Singaporean economy (Li 1998). In his study of youth in the army, Leong Choon Cheong notes that Chinese national servicemen describe Malay men as 'lazy, unintelligent, unhygienic, and aggressive' (cited in Rahim 1998: 57-8), while laziness and drug taking also emerge as common stereotypes of Malay male youth in contemporary studies of popular culture (see Liew and Fu 2006). There has been little scholarly attention, however, to the continued salience of these stereotypes and the complexities surrounding 'Malay identity' over the last three decades, particularly in the context of growing class diversity amongst Malays. There has also been little examination of the implicit gendering of these accounts. Common racial stereotypes of 'Malays' rarely make gender distinctions, with the exception of accounts regarding teenage pregnancies that focus on the promiscuous behaviour of Malay girls. For this reason, our study sought to examine the ways in which young professional men themselves understand the continued relevance of the common stereotypes that circulate about Malay men.

When asked how they thought Malay men were perceived by the non-Malay Singaporean community, the men we interviewed responded with terms and phrases like 'slacker', 'relaxed', 'sitting in void decks', 'soccer players', 'doing technical work', 'artists', or 'not professionals'. Another man, Abdullah, a 28 year-old entrepreneur, described the traits commonly ascribed to Malays as pre-colonial:

> The Malays are easily content, laidback. We managed to survive the British invasion in that way. Can you imagine what would have happened if the Temenggong had not sold our island? Got some money, happy already!

For the men we interviewed, the marginality of Malay masculinity is re-inforced in these stereotypes. Acutely aware of how their own life choices and experiences are shaped by expectations of Malay cultural inferiority, these men actively construct their own masculinities in contradistinction to these images.

The 'Level' Playing Field

Ambitious young Malay men's decisions not to act out the 'typical Malay' trope are complicated by state and community structures that reinforce Malays' subordinate positionality. The claim that Singapore operates on a 'level playing field' (i.e., meritocracy) obscures the myriad ways in which Singaporeans from all racial groups are encouraged to assimilate into PAP-promoted values. The education system is an important site for this process of 'social engineering'. For example, Barr and Low's (2005) study of kindergartens demonstrates the ways in which education policy and the policy of educational 'streaming' tie future success to academic learning. These practices impact negatively on many children in low-income households of all racial groups, who often lack positive role models in school and find it difficult to study and receive support in their home environments. Rahim (1998) argues that active discrimination and stereotyping also occurs in schools – Malay children are streamed into technical areas and rarely encouraged to pursue academic subjects. When educational streaming is combined with racial stereotyping, it can have a profound impact on future education and employment opportunities.

These processes are further reinforced by the strong segregation that occurs within schools, in which children (and teachers) tend to mix with members of their own ethnic group (see Lee et al. 2004; Li 1989; Rahim 1998). For Malay children this is enhanced by a strong cultural imperative not to be a 'loner'. This pressure is exemplified in the following conversation amongst three young professional Malay men in their late 20s. The three men met during secondary school.

Zainul: I didn't play soccer until secondary school. When I see Malay guys playing soccer … I have this perception that these are the real Malay guys … because they play soccer, they speak Malay. [As a consequence] I feel pressure to play soccer.

Musa: You feel isolated.

Zainul: Pressure to play. So I started to learn, but after a while you grow up and feel more confident to try other things. But at elementary and high school soccer is more central.

Interviewer: Pressure from other Malay boys?

Zainul: They feel that you must or otherwise you are not [a real Malay].

Iqbal: We pressure ourselves. Not to be seen as isolated individuals.

For Zainul, a 26 year-old civil servant, playing soccer became a means of being accepted within his Malay peer group. In the process, he became 'a real Malay guy' who spoke Malay and could perform a culturally acceptable form of Malay masculinity. The transcript presented above does not portray the reactions of Iqbal (a 26-year-old civil servant) and Musa (a 27-year-old teacher) to Zainul's opening statement. When Zainul said 'I didn't play soccer until secondary school', Musa immediately responded by shouting out: 'But good!' [meaning: He played well] followed by laughter from Iqbal and Musa and a wry smile from Zainul as he continued to speak. When he said 'I feel pressured to play soccer' there was further laughter. The laughter and jibe about Zainul's soccer skills served to reinforce the centrality of the soccer identity for all the men. Soccer is a means of establishing group identity for Malay men despite their recognition that peer pressure to be a 'real Malay guy' by playing soccer served to re-inscribe racial stereotyping.[10]

Positive racism

Although the men we spoke to were able to provide detailed descriptions of the stereotypes that circulate about Malay men, they were uncomfortable describing these as instances of racism or prejudice. Where a stereotype is linked to a positive portrayal of skill (as in the example of soccer or Malays being good singers), it is difficult to identify those stereotypes as discriminatory. Jamal, a 27 year-old therapist, related how in secondary school non-Malays always assumed he would be good at soccer: 'Even if they haven't seen you play, they automatically think you are going to be good and call you up to play on their team'. As the men asserted, 'We really *are* good soccer players.'

Racist notions of minority men's masculine physicality are common in other cultural and national settings (cf. Majors 1998; Messner 1989). The men were cognisant of the parallels between their situation and that of minority men in other countries, as demonstrated in the follow-

ing exchange that preceded the discussion of soccer playing outlined above:

Zainul: At university, they know I am Malay, they want me to play soccer.

Musa: They perceive us to be better at technical aspects, soccer, sports, that kind of thing. I think in terms of education they don't know us, because our numbers in university are so small.

Iqbal: Similar to African-Americans and all.

Positive portrayals of minority men's 'innate' physical attributes and sporting prowess act as a source of community pride, and also serve to channel boys and young men into naturalized roles in commodified sports cultures that in turn reinforce 'positive' racism (Hokowhitu 2004: 262). In a similar way, for the young men in our study, the dominance of Malay players in the national soccer league is both a reminder of ethnic stereotyping and a source of ethnic pride.

Another common image that the men found difficult to critique is the emphasis on the Malays' suitability as entertainers given their 'innate' artistic abilities. Musa asserted: 'We are considered to be good artists because two Singapore Idols are Malays.' Similarly, the men could see little harm in the comic role commonly played by Malay men in English and Chinese sit-coms. Zainul stated: 'I think the Malay man in the mass media is portrayed not as a negative. They may portray [him] as a buffoon but not negative. In a comedy setting it is very funny.' Stereotypes in film and television serve as a convenient form of shorthand to convey information about characters. In the case of comedy, such stereotypes help to establish instantly recognizable character types (King 2002). Exaggerated portrayals of racial traits can be a form of parody, and thus a strategy of subversion of racial norms. Distinguishing between satire and the reproduction of racism is fraught. Scholars of race have argued that trying to differentiate between racism and 'harmless' racial jokes obscures the normalising function of racial stereotypes. For example, writing about the United States, Park et al. (2006) assert that although comedies starring racial minorities facilitate racial tolerance, including the acceptance of Asian men, they rely on an explicit, and often normalized, representation of racial hierarchy. One of the consequences of this is the naturalization of racial stereotypes. The association of Malays with technical, sporting or artistic skills and Chinese with entrepreneurial ability is reinforced in a local Chinese joke,

which serves to entrench a widely held belief that the Chinese excel in business and other racial groups do not:

> Q: Why don't the Chinese play soccer?
> A: Because as soon as we get a corner, we open a shop.

The men's discussion of stereotypes and their reluctance to identify these as instances of racism may reflect a widespread unwillingness by Singaporeans to discuss race issues publicly (Lai 1995). Openly voicing opinions about racial discrimination can lead to public (and criminal) charges of being a 'racial chauvinist'.[11] At the same time, however, these views must also be read against the men's own understanding of the saliency of such stereotypes – as in this conversation with Salleh, a 27 year-old engineer:

Salleh: I think sometimes you can't blame them [non-Malays]. Like Malays take drugs and all. And I also feel that Malays are lazy.

Interviewer: Why?

Salleh: They are easily content with life. They have a short-term objective in life. To get a car. Even if they cannot afford one they must buy a car, must buy a big house, but their kids education they don't care about. I have some stories from my friends lah. They can't afford their kids poly[technic] education or university education but they can afford one big car and everything else lah. They like to show off. And they are full of debts.

The men contrasted their own achievements, including their tertiary education and professional employment, with those of the 'typical Malay'. Although they were familiar with the common stereotypes used to describe Malays, they either excluded themselves from these descriptions or admitted to limited, and less problematic, 'slippages'. A common example was the men's descriptions of their own study habits in contrast to those of their Chinese classmates. A number of the men admitted that unlike their Chinese peers, they did not study as hard, but rather were satisfied with achieving a pass grade in their tertiary studies. They described this character fault – laziness – as a product of their Malayness and simultaneously painted an unproblematic portrait of *all* their Chinese classmates as hardworking, high achievers. Although the men did not measure up to an idealized vision of hegemonic Chinese masculinity, they nonetheless aspired to it and strived to

achieve what they described as a 'normal' way of 'being a man'. When asked to talk about Chinese masculinity, Zulfikar, a 30 year-old flight attendant, responded: 'I guess Chinese guys are like normal. Stereotypical ... what we expect of normal society.'

The men in our study are caught in a double bind – they want to challenge the veracity of the many negative stereotypes used to label the Malay community, and particularly Malay men, but they also rely on those same stereotypes to secure their own 'exceptional' status in relation to education and employment opportunities, as well as achievements, within the Malay community. When they fail to measure up to their own, and society's, definition of a 'normal man', they attribute their personal failings to an inherited cultural inferiority. The men's entry into the middle class is thus always fragile and premised on their ability to internalize and demonstrate the 'superior' values of industry and thrift. Tania Li (1989) observed that amongst middle-income Malay parents these insecurities are manifested in the decision to move their families out of lower-income housing estates and to encourage their children to socialize with non-Malay friends. While the majority of men in our study were unmarried, they exhibited a similar desire to demarcate the boundaries between themselves and other Malays whom they described as members of the 'lower class'.

Masculinity across Borders

During the discussions that were held with the interviewees about non-Singaporean Malay men, the internalization of the middle-income attributes of thrift and hard work by professional Singapore Malay men became even more apparent. In asserting a claim about the 'foreignness' of non-Singaporean Malays, the men drew on their direct experiences of travel to Indonesia and Malaysia. All of the interviewees had travelled to Malaysia for short holidays, and sometimes on business. Two-thirds of them had travelled to Indonesia, primarily Jakarta, for similar reasons. Their accounts of these 'other Malays' drew on their travel experiences as well as common Singaporean stereotypes of Malaysian Malays and Indonesians.[12] The men were all sensitive to the national significance of the discourse of a 'Singaporean Singapore', in opposition to a 'Malay Malaysia', and were familiar with the issue of loyalty that hung over the Malay community. However, they were adamant that the concept of a shared cross-border identity with other Malays made little sense.

In their accounts of their trips abroad, shared culture, language and religion emerged as important factors in facilitating ease of travel. While many of the men described the enjoyment they obtained from eating Malaysian and Indonesian food when they travelled,[13] some also

expressed relief that they did not have to worry about dietary restrictions. As Musa observed in relation to the presence of halal[14] food: 'The moment I reach Malaysia or Indonesia the first thing that hits my mind is that I can eat almost everything.' Musa's comment suggests that for Malay Muslims living in Singapore, restrictions associated with food taboos cannot be underestimated. A wide variety of halal food is available in Singapore, and most large businesses and schools which provide canteens also supply separate eating utensils for halal food stalls. When eating in unfamiliar places many Muslims may err on the side of caution by only ordering drinks or fruit. Many Singaporean Muslims also acknowledge that non-Muslims are not always aware of the issues associated with food taboos, and do not appear to understand that many Muslims feel awkward if their Chinese friends and colleagues order pork dishes and eat them at the same table. Food taboos become less important when travelling abroad to a predominantly Muslim country, and consequently the men felt a sense of ease in relation to their dietary habits.

For those men who had travelled to Indonesia or Malaysia as part of a racially mixed group of friends or colleagues, language was an important source of cultural capital in the groups' interactions with Indonesian or Malay service providers, including hotel and restaurant staff and taxi drivers. Their ability to communicate in Bahasa Melayu or Bahasa Indonesia immediately made them indispensable to their Chinese friends and colleagues. Their ethnicity was thus a positive rather than a negative attribute. They explained that in Singapore, Malay language abilities are not highly valued when compared to Mandarin. They argued that Chinese employers frequently discriminate against Malays in job advertisements by using the phrase 'Bilingual in English and Mandarin' as a required or desirable skill. When travelling to Malaysia and Indonesia, Malay men's ability to act as language brokers for non-Malay speaking Singaporeans not only improved their status within their peer group, but also inevitably allowed them to adopt the position of cultural broker in interactions between their peer group, and between themselves and Indonesians or Malaysian Malays. Language ability thus became an important source of power.

At a personal level, shared language is a means to ease the stress that often accompanies travel. The majority of the men are effectively bilingual in English and Malay, and professed to feeling comfortable travelling anywhere these languages are spoken. Although their travels to Indonesia or Malaysia for work or leisure were not premised on language, it clearly facilitated the travel process. However, shared language is not an attribute that all of the men wanted to draw upon in their interactions with Malaysian Malays or Indonesians. For example, Zulfikar, an ambitious flight attendant with Singapore Airlines, chooses to distance

himself by deliberately using English as a marker of his Singaporean nationality:

> I choose to let them know that I'm Singaporean because... because I know we are much more superior than them ... I choose not to be mistaken as being like Malaysian or an Indonesian. Although I can do a Malaysian-Malay accent or an Indonesian accent. That kind of thing. But I choose strategically not to be assimilated. But ... if there's trouble or that kind of thing and I know that being local counts, I guess I can... I have to do it. But otherwise, to show my superiority [I speak in English] I guess.

Differences in purchasing power are another area for the demonstration of Singaporean Malay superiority. This sense of superiority is most clearly expressed in a comment by Iskandar, a 32 year-old journalist, who said: 'When realising that you are Singaporean, they like kowtow to you a bit and, okay, make a deal. We have better bargaining power nowadays.' The greater bargaining power experienced by Iskandar is a product of Singapore's rapid economic development, which has produced higher standards of living and significant income disparities between Singaporeans and their regional neighbours.

The men stated that as a consequence of Singapore's economic development there has been a distinct divide between their lives and those of their regional neighbours. Despite the benefits that accrue from shared language and cultural and religious practices, all of the men felt alien when they travelled to Indonesia and Malaysia. In our conversations, the men frequently distanced themselves from the backwardness of Indonesian or Malaysian cultures by emphasising their Singaporean-ness. They claimed that although they shared language and religious and cultural traits with Indonesians and Malaysian Malays, they identified more closely with Chinese and Indian Singaporeans. According to Salleh,

> When in Malaysia, I feel proud to be a Singaporean because at least I can tell the Malaysian guys that I stand on the same page as the other races in my home country. Because I met some Malaysians who kept telling me that that Malays in Singapore don't know their rights. What they are saying is that Singapore belongs to the Malays [as indigenous peoples]. I think Singapore belongs to no one. It's a meritocracy.

While the divide is most easily measured by English language ability and income differentials, it also manifests itself in the outlook and behaviour of Malaysian Malays and Indonesians.

> When I was there [Malaysia] I felt that we are better off. Better level of education. Can speak English. More worldly. ... Because over there not many Malays are that well educated. And they don't really speak English. They work in the services sector ... And it doesn't help that some of them are really quite rude to you in a very bad way. Like a third world country mentality.

The 'third world mentality' that Zainul refers to was brought up by many other interviewees who described the perceived differences between Singaporean efficiency and Indonesian or Malaysian backwardness, inefficiency and corruption. The poor standard of living and lack of economic development in both countries were compared unfavourably to conditions experienced in Singapore. According to Iskandar,

> I think the standard of living there is very low. Many of them would do anything just to get a dollar, they will just do anything, even cheat others. Even though I am a Muslim, he is a Muslim. I am from the same culture, they are from the same culture but they don't care about that. They would do anything just to get a dollar.

For the young men in our study, travel to Indonesia or Malaysia did not represent a trip back to some form of authentic Malay culture and identity.[15] This is in contrast to older Malay men and women informants who described in some detail the joy they obtained from experiencing 'the real *kampong* lifestyle' and visiting places that were 'just like Singapore in the 1950s or 60s'. Rather, it served to strengthen the young Malay men's awareness of their middle-income achievements. In this way, inefficiency, corruption and deception are not only markers of national difference between Singapore and its neighbours. These traits distinguish backward non-Singaporean Malays from modern Singaporean Malays.

At the same time, the keen awareness that remnants of an inefficient Malay culture remain in Singapore, coupled with a culture that venerates the Chinese as hard working, results in a cultural hierarchy that positions other Malays below Singaporean Malays. According to Zulkifar,

> Malaysian Malays see us as being much more snobby – snobbish. And, ah ... yeah, more like among the upper class. But I guess I deem them as much more inferior because of how their living standards are and how they grew up lah. I guess in a way they don't really have to work hard – they don't have to put in effort to survive. And there's no competitiveness in them. So they're much more – they're even more laid-back than us lah!

> And they really have bad English. So, they're inferior to us. ...
> The Chinese deem the Malay group to be Ma-lazy. So, I guess in
> a way we have to prove ourselves, that we can actually also do the
> job – even better than them. But of course, although the Singa-
> porean Malays are deemed to be lazy, I guess you can really see
> that the Malaysian Malays are much lazier.

According to the men, their own personal difference from those they
consider to be more 'Ma-lazy' stems from the opportunities that Singa-
pore's advanced, meritocratic society has afforded them. As Mustafa, a
29 year-old IT worker, states: '[Singaporean] Malays tend to be go-get-
ters, we live in an environment where you have to work, don't laze
around. Over there they don't work unless they really have to.' Although
Mustafa describes all Singaporean Malays as 'go-getters', he acknowl-
edges that he is really only referring to middle-income, educated Malays
such as himself, who have taken advantage of the opportunities pro-
vided in a multiracial, meritocratic society, and adopted a 'Singaporean'
identity.

Mary Louise Pratt's (1992) concept of the 'contact zone' provides
a useful way of thinking about the nature of these Malay men's cross-
border encounters. Pratt uses the term to emphasize 'how subjects are
constituted in and by their relations to each other... not in terms of
separateness or apartheid, but in terms of co-presence, interaction,
interlocking understandings and practices, often within radically asym-
metrical relations of power' (Pratt 1992: 7). As we have shown here,
middle-income Singaporean Malay men's experiences with the other
Malays of Malaysia and Indonesia in the contact zone serves to rein-
force their Singaporean-ness, not their shared cultural and religious
heritages. It enables them to recast their marginality within Singapore
by emphasizing the cultural capital afforded to them by being modern
Malay men.

Conclusion

Our analysis calls attention to the complex intersections between ethni-
city, class and nationality in shaping constructions of masculinity. How-
ever, it is also apparent that there is the need to understand the ways
masculinities are shaped by temporal and geo-spatial shifts. These is-
sues are clearly demonstrated in the interviewees' descriptions of their
lower-class Singaporean Malay compatriots, as well as in their accounts
of their travels to Indonesia and Malaysia. The interviewees' discussions
of what it means to be a Malay man in Singapore today are shaped by
their complex reading of their own location within an ethnic commu-

nity that is the subject of constant criticism and the object of racial discrimination. They have been brought up in an environment that valorises hard work as a Chinese attribute. In contrast to the positive accounts of the Chinese community's entrepreneurial spirit and thrift, Malays are reprimanded for their indolence and questioned about their loyalty to the nation. The young professional Malay men in our study have responded to these issues by internalising a set of state-sponsored values that they describe as essential elements of Singapore's national identity. At home, amongst the Chinese majority, they work hard to distance themselves from other Singaporean Malays whom they depict as lazy and backward in their outlook.

These distancing strategies are also apparent in the men's accounts of their travel to Indonesia and Malaysia. They describe Malaysian Malays and Indonesians as backward, corrupt and inefficient and assert that these other Malays are even lazier than their lower-class Singaporean counterparts. When they travel abroad, the men's wealth, education and middle class outlook serve as easily identifiable markers of their superiority when compared to subordinate Indonesian and Malaysian men.[16] More significantly, the men actively use these attributes to lay claim to a 'Singaporean-ness' that they share with other middle-income Singaporeans. Rather than providing a shared sense of ethnic Pan-Malay identity, travel serves to assert the men's difference from Malays in the region. Paradoxically, then, the sense of superiority that these men experience when travelling to Indonesia and Malaysia re-inscribes their marginality in Singapore. Rather than making them feel racial discrimination more keenly, their experience of travel to majority-Malay countries reinforces their satisfaction with the status quo. This view was summed up by Iqbal, who asserts that 'Although we are discriminated against... we are all living happy lives here.'

It is this statement, perhaps more than any others, that sums up the complex nature of these men's subordinate masculinity vis-à-vis Chinese Singaporean men. The men seek to minimize the damaging implications of racial discrimination by distancing themselves not only from lower-class Malays within their own ethnic community, but from the Malay citizens of less developed countries in the region. Crossing the border affords them the opportunity to imagine a space in which they are no longer a marginalized ethnic minority, but a successful example of Malay masculinity built on hard work and disciplined effort. At home, however, they know that as much as they try, they will always be tainted by the discourse of cultural inferiority. As Iqbal's comment suggests, young middle-income Malay men manage this dilemma by entering into a bargain with the state – they decide to be 'Singaporean first', and in doing so accept cultural discrimination for the rewards of modernity.

Notes

1   The term 'race' is used in Singapore to refer to official state ethnic categories. Its usage implies that ethnic groups are marked not only by cultural and linguistic difference, but also biological differences. For a discussion of the ways in which the term race is used in popular and state discourses in Singapore, see Lai (1995). We use the term 'race' throughout this article to reflect its common usage in Singapore.

2   Malays are a significant ethnic minority in Singapore, representing 14% of the total population. The Chinese are the dominant ethnic group (75%), with a smaller minority of Indians (9%), and Others, including Eurasians and Europeans (Singapore Department of Statistics 2007). The state defines Malays as 'persons of Malay or Indonesian origin, such as Javanese, Boyanese, Bugis, etc.' (Singapore Department of Statistics 2007).

3   Lee Hsien Loong's comments were made at a time when bi-lateral relations with Malaysia were particularly tense, and further sparked ongoing allegations by the Malaysian government that the PAP actively discriminated against Malays (see Leifer 2000).

4   For example, Lily Rahim (1999: 39) argues that the 'Malaysia card' has been 'periodically employed by the PAP leadership to maintain a collective psyche of insecurity among the predominantly Chinese populace who are acutely conscious of the island's resource limitations and geo-political locale in the heart of a Malay-Muslim region'. She notes that the 'Singapore card' has similarly been deployed on the Malaysian side of the causeway.

5   In seeking to problematise the notion of a homogenous Malay identity we are not suggesting that 'the Chinese' are a monolithic group. CMIO multiracialism obscures heterogeneity within *all* so-called official races (Lai 1995).

6   The research on which this paper is based was funded by an Australian Research Council (ARC) Discovery Project grant *In the Shadow of Singapore: The Limits of Transnationalism in Insular Riau* (DP0557368) – see project website http://www.uow.edu.au/arts/research/intheshadow/. We particularly want to thank Mohamed Fairoz bin Ahmad for his assistance in conducting some of the interviews.

7   Differences in educational qualifications do not provide the only explanation for Malay marginalisation. The numerically superior Chinese erect a range of barriers to exclude Malays (and Indians) from higher paying occupations, including active discrimination in hiring practices and promotion practices, as well as more subtle barriers such as language requirements (Lee 2004).

8   Barr and Low (2005, 161) argue that CMIO multiracialism enjoys a 'truly symbiotic relationship' with the other key pillar of PAP rule – meritocracy – a policy that emphasises the fairness of the Singapore system and explains the subordinate role of minority races.

9   This view continued to be deployed by the new ruling elite in the early years of Independence. For example, Holden (2001: 420) argues that in former Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew's memoir, *The Singapore Story* (1999), Indian and Malay men are portrayed as 'effete, governed by emotion and appetite, and unable to apply the disciplinary practices necessary for the founding of a new nation'.

10 It is also a source of ethnic pride. At the very end of this interview, they returned to the topic of soccer and concluded the discussion with the following comment – 'Mostly we are good soccer players'. We interpreted this statement as a means of concluding the interview with a positive statement about Malay masculinity.

11 Although it was easy for the men to provide lists of common stereotypes about different racial groups, some of them were reluctant to discuss instances where they had personally experienced discrimination. Sometimes they would talk about events that had affected unnamed friends or family, or they would halt the direction of the conversation with claims that such matters were 'too sensitive' for further discussion. These concerns were also expressed in the men's choice of language. The majority of interviews were conducted in public places such as restaurants and coffee shops. In these settings, there were frequent

opportunities for other patrons to eavesdrop or overhear comments. It was not uncommon in these settings for the men to lower their voices or code switch from English into Malay when discussing instances of racism, or when talking negatively about the behaviour of the Chinese majority population.

12 We use the term 'other Malays' here in the way in which our respondents used it – to refer to Malays in Malaysia, and Indonesians. The term does not refer to an ethnic identity but a seemingly homogenous population characterised by language (Bahasa Melayu/Indonesia) and religion (Islam).

13 Enjoyment of food in itself is a marker of one's authentic 'Singaporean-ness' (cf. Chua 2003).

14 'Halal' is a word taken from Arabic that means lawful or permitted, and refers to any food or drink that is permitted for consumption under Islam.

15 A number of our Chinese informants described their trips to Mainland China as an opportunity to 're-connect' with their Chinese culture and identity, often with mixed results.

16 It is these men's middle class outlook that is perhaps the greatest marker of difference. Due to the greater purchasing power of the Singapore dollar in the region, many working-class Singaporean Malay men are able to experience a 'middle-income lifestyle' when they cross the border. However, these experiences of class mobility are usually only transitory. For a greater discussion of working-class Singaporean Malay masculinity, see our work on cross-border marriages and sex tourism in the Riau Islands (Lyons and Ford 2008).

10 Trans-National Biographies and Trans-National Habiti: The Case of Chinese-Singaporeans in Hong Kong[1]

Caroline Plüss

Do individuals who have lived in different societies, develop multi-local life-worlds? How, and why, do life-worlds, with cultural, social and economic characteristics that have their roots in different geographical regions, develop within individuals? The present chapter aims to elucidate and apply the concept of trans-national *habitus* to make a contribution to the scholarship by analysing why and how individuals who have lived in different societies and cultures develop cosmopolitan or culturally hybrid identities (Basch, Schiller and Blanc 1994; Kelly and Lusis 2006; Onwumechili et al. 2003; Levitt and Schiller 2004; Plüss 2005; Plaza 2006).

Trans-national migrants are likely to establish and maintain networks with people with different cultural characteristics, given that the people with whom the migrants are in contact with are likely to live in different geographical regions (Conway and Potter 2006). The line of enquiry this study investigates is whether people who have lived in different societies change their cultural identities (by forming trans-national *habiti*), since it may be assumed that they wish to construct new forms of cultural capital to access cultural, social and economic resources located in different social networks that are rooted in different geographical regions and that, therefore, have different cultural characteristics.

The concept of *habitus* is important in conceptualising the fluid characteristics of migrants' cultural change in more tangible terms. This concept has been developed in the work of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, who defined '*habitus*' as a person's 'durable and transposable systems of schemata of perception, appreciation, and action that result from the institution of the social in the body' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 126-7). In simpler terms, *habitus* may be understood as a person's 'lasting disposition', consisting of 'habits of behaviour, feeling and thought' (Thapan 2006: 200). As Bourdieu emphasises, although a *habitus* is a lasting disposition, it is also an open system of dispositions that can be changed through new experiences (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 133).

The question of how migrants transform their *habiti* is part of the larger question of how *habiti* become transformed under conditions of globalisation. These include conditions in which the cultural, social and economic experiences of a person no longer correspond to the cultural, social and economic characteristics of any one place alone, but intersect the cultural, social and economic dimensions that have their roots in different regions. Migrants' formation of new *habiti* is likely to express the fact that trans-national migration, which is characterised by the fact that migrants refer to several societies on cultural, social and economic levels, changes the cultural, social and economic matrices in which those migrants' experiences take place. Trans-national *habiti* are ways of perceiving and expressing things that integrate cultural, social and economic characteristics that have their roots in different regions and localities. Trans-national *habiti* are always partially de-territorialised, which makes them correspond to the cultural conditions of globalisation.

Singaporeans are a mobile population. Approximately ten per cent of Singapore's population (citizens and permanent residents) were estimated to be residing abroad in 2007, that is, 370,000 individuals (Peh 2007). Unverified sources estimate the number of Singaporeans living in Hong Kong in 2007 at between 10,000 and 14,000. My pilot study of ten Chinese-Singaporeans in Hong Kong shows that they have lived in more than two countries. One male interviewee born in 1962 had lived in eight countries; two female interviewees born in 1961 and 1962 respectively had each lived in seven countries; one female interviewee born in 1965 had lived in six countries; one male interviewee born in 1965 had lived in five countries; one female interviewee born in 1983 had lived in four countries; and two female and two male interviewees born in 1981, 1975, 1979 and 1961 respectively had each lived in three countries. Although Hong Kong and Mainland China are in fact the same country, for the purposes of this study, they have been considered as distinct, given their cultural, social, economic and political differences.

This is an astonishingly high number of countries to have lived in, especially given return migration to any one country of previous residence has not been considered as an additional migratory experience. Doing so would yield an even higher number of international movements. However, it cannot be expected that each single instance in a series of migrations is equally important in terms of how migrants build trans-national *habiti*. Counting the number of countries the migrants had lived in increases, at least potentially, the number of cultural matrices a migrant has possibly had to negotiate. Perhaps the length of residence and the reasons for migration, rather than how many times a person lived in a place, are also relevant in explaining an individual's cultural transformations.

Despite the fact that serial migration, or trans-national sojourning, is growing as a social phenomenon in tandem with the increase in globalisation, with more and more people seeking to maximise their cultural, social and economic resources by living in different places, the question of why and how such serial migration changes people culturally has not yet been given sufficient attention (Ley and Kobayashi 2005; Potter, Conway and Philips 2005; Onwumechili et al. 2003; Waters 2006).

This study therefore seeks to elaborate upon the ways in which migrants transform their cultural identities and their adoption of new cultural elements in order to signal insider positions in new social networks, and to access the social and economic resources of those networks. By examining the accounts of the trans-national biographies of three Chinese-Singaporeans who lived in Hong Kong, the study aims to find answers to the question of whether a migrant's transformation of his or her cultural identity is driven by his or her wish to construct new cultural capital.

Constructing a Trans-National *Habitus* and the Building of Cultural Capital

The formulation of the concept of a trans-national *habitus* was first elaborated by Kelly and Lusis (2006). They suggested that a trans-national *habitus* is defined by the fact that migrants experience cultural, social and economic characteristics in a new place of residence while also taking into account the cultural, social and economic characteristics of their previous place of residence. '*Habitus*' is a person's 'framework of evaluations and expectations which lead to the conscious or intuitive prioritizing of certain dispositions and practices' (Kelly and Lusis 2006: 833). It seems important to stress that trans-national *habiti* may derive not only from conscious decision making but also from the unconscious and tacit adoption of new cultural elements, even though there may be no immediate rationalisations for such change. This is not to say that migrants remain unaware of how they change. Rather, such changes are not necessarily always a rational and deliberate calculation.

When a person moves voluntarily to a new place, he or she does so because they perceive that new place to embody cultural, social and/or economic characteristics that are different from those of their current place of abode, and that the new place and its characteristics are more conductive to realising his or her goals. Moving to a new place is often done in the hope of augmenting resources. However, when a migrant moves to a new place, he or she also brings cultural, social and/or economic characteristics that are different from the new place of residence, and these differences often lead to migrants being rejected (Potter, Con-

way and Philips 2005). One strategy that a migrant may use to increase his or her social acceptance is to acquire some of the new cultural characteristics, that is, to partially assimilate, so that he or she can display more of the cultural characteristics that are shared with the inhabitants in this new location.

If this cultural change is linked to 'signal characteristics' in order to access cultural, social and economic resources in a new place of abode, this can be called building and assimilating new cultural capital (Plüss forthcoming). Cultural capital comprises the cultural resources that are required to be admitted into the membership of a social network. Cultural capital derives largely from cultivation and self-presentation, including such elements as educational qualifications, professional qualifications, tastes, knowledge, status symbols, language, accents and dress (Bourdieu 1984; Plüss 2005; Waters 2006). When the manifesting of cultural capital helps a migrant access some of the social resources enshrined in a network, cultural capital is thereby converted into social capital (Bourdieu 1986: 243-8).

Members of a social network are entitled to some of its resources (social capital) because social capital is based on reciprocity and trust. Social capital includes information, friendship and various forms of support, including business contacts or access to manpower (Bourdieu 1986: 248-52; Mobasher 2004; Portes 2004). Educational and professional qualifications have often been described as cultural capital that enables people to access social and economic resources (Bourdieu 1984). Social capital can be converted into economic capital, for instance, when someone gains a salary from employment that is obtained through helpful information provided by a social network.

A trans-national *habitus* is likely to contain different forms of cultural capital that enable people to establish and maintain access to social and economic resources located in different networks in different regions. Migrants may wish not only to assimilate in order to augment their resources, but also to maintain cultural characteristics rooted in their previous place or places of residence so that these cultural characteristics can serve as cultural capital to access social and economic resources enshrined in networks with co-ethnics, or with people still living in the former place or places of residence (Portes 2004). The formation of cultural capital may not always be a deliberate and calculated strategy, although it may often be so. People can adopt new cultural characteristics without receiving explanations about their meaning. They may do so after experiencing what works and what does not work, that is, by experiencing what brings acceptance and what brings rejection. On the other hand, it is important to stress that cultural capital cannot always be converted into social or economic capital, despite dedicated efforts to do so. For example, racial differences may work as negative 'symbolic

capital' (Ong 1999: 25), leading to the social exclusion of migrants despite their cultural and economic resources.

Wishing to maintain 'old' cultural capital and include new cultural capital in a *habitus* may cause a person to endorse values that contradict one another. One way to resolve the ensuing tensions is to not fully endorse any one of the contradicting values, thus reducing contradiction. A person can seek to construct cultural capital by only partially endorsing the values of a social network, while simultaneously emphasising partial differentiation. For example, people can stress that they possess characteristics that the network values, but lacks. Cultural capital that only partially endorses the values of a network, and that stresses some differentiation from these values, can be described as differentiating cultural capital. For example, a young Chinese-Singaporean migrant who wished to increase his acceptance among Australian students in an Australian boarding school hoped that by emphasising his Singaporean education, namely his good knowledge of Asian history as well as his acquisition of cosmopolitan characteristics, these would constitute features that Australian students valued. He found these characteristics were somewhat lacking in Australian students (Plüss forthcoming). On the other hand, if migrants acquire cultural characteristics that affirm the cultural values of a network, they construct assimilating cultural capital.

The data for this study stem from three in-depth interviews, during which the interviewees were encouraged to recount their trans-national lives. The interviews lasted between one and three hours. One of the aims of the interviews was to gather information that would answer the question: To what extent were the migrants' constructions of trans-national *habiti* the result of the need of the migrants to establish and maintain an insider position in different networks in different places? Careful consideration was made to let the interviewees identify the events that were important to them. Questions about what happened after each migration, especially on the social level, and about their experiences of rejection and discrimination, were also posed.

The interviewees' accounts of their trans-national biographies are retrospective, and are therefore made from the standpoint of their present experiences and interests. Nonetheless, these accounts are valid data to be used for the examination of how migrants construct trans-national *habiti*, insofar as these *habiti* are situated in the present. In interviewing returning migrants to the Caribbean, Gmelch has pointed to some difficulties in interviewing migrants about their past experiences. These difficulties included the interviewees' inability to remember events accurately, interviewees being selective in the recounting of past events, changes in the interviewees' attitudes over time as a result of changes to their recollections, and the influence of the interviewer upon intervie-

wees' accounts (Gmelch 1995: 311-8). The present study has allowed for the fact that the interviewees were making retrospective interpretations, because trans-national *habiti* are formed through experiences made in subsequent places of residence, and therefore always intersect present experiences with those of the past. Experiences of the past influence how the present is then experienced.

The data gathered from three interviews, or ten, cannot accurately represent the experiences of all Chinese-Singaporeans in Hong Kong. However, the importance of the three accounts studied here is to indicate, at the micro-level, that we can expect a high degree of diversity in how individuals who lived in different societies combine elements from different cultures; and that trans-national *habiti* can become relatively fluid constructs when they contain cultural capital through which migrants seek to realize cultural, social and economic aspirations in different social networks with roots in different geographical regions.

Layering Assimilating Cultural Capital through the Building of a Trans-National *Habitus*

This is the example of Cheryl, who was 45 years old at the time of the interview, and works in the information technology sector. Her current stay in Hong Kong started in 2004, although she had also lived in the territory during the 1990s. She is divorced from a Hong Kong-Chinese man, plans to remain in Hong Kong until she retires, when she might decide to move to Mainland China. She does not visit Singapore very often, although she keeps in contact with her Chinese-Singaporean family members in Singapore and in the United States. Cheryl has migrated five times, having lived twice for extended time periods in three countries: Singapore, the United Kingdom and Hong Kong.

Cheryl moved to Britain to go to boarding school when she was 17 years old. The cultural capital she acquired in Singapore, namely a good command of English and familiarity with the British syllabus, prepared her well for Britain. She excelled in boarding school and did well at university. She found education in Britain to be 'less pressurising' than in Singapore. She explained that because of her familiarity with British culture, she did not experience any problems with social and cultural integration, even in relation to the British people she met at boarding school, through part-time work, and at university. She did not have to make any major adjustments. The cultural capital she acquired in Singapore enabled her to relate positively to more aspects of British culture or, in her own words, to follow her motto while living abroad: 'When in Rome, do as the Romans do.' She reported a few difficulties regarding re-adjustments to life in Singapore upon her return, as she experienced

some loss of independence and found she had fewer choices than she had had in Britain. She married her Hong Kong-Chinese boyfriend, whom she met at university, and started working in the Information Technology sector.

They moved to Hong Kong when she was 29 years old, as her husband wished to set up a business with his family. The friendships Cheryl had established with her fellow Hong Kong students in Britain helped her integration process into Cantonese society, a process, however, that she found difficult, in terms of both learning Cantonese and interacting with new people. The process of integration became more intensive when she started working and learned more Cantonese from her colleagues. She reported that after three years of working, she found more acceptance:

> Those colleagues who were initially not that close ... think I am a Hong Kong person now ... They don't even ask if I am a foreigner anymore. That's how much I picked up the culture, the language ... I do feel like I'm part of the society.

She divorced her husband and, when she was 37, accepted a transfer to work in Scotland. There, she had an expatriate life that she shared with colleagues who had also been transferred from other countries. When her employment became less secure, she felt she had few remaining prospects in the United Kingdom. She thought that if she worked in a Chinese society, she would be on 'her own home ground' and would be treated like a 'grade-A worker' rather than as a 'grade-B person'. She felt her race and nationality, despite her familiarity with the UK, prevented her from having the right access to social and economic resources she felt she needed.

Cheryl returned to Hong Kong in 2004, 'switching' to a Cantonese culture. When I asked her about how one changes cultures, she explained that she never tries to 'merge' cultures, and that this is why she has been easily able to fit into any one of the cultures she has lived in:

> Let me give you an example. A lot of people in Hong Kong ask me about language ... I speak English all the time with someone, I speak Cantonese, and then of course ... I will speak Hokkien, and in China I speak Mandarin. So they say ... what language do you think in when you speak a language? I say you have to think in that language that you are speaking in. So if you ask me in English, I will think in English and I will speak in English. If I speak in Cantonese, I will speak in Cantonese. So you don't do a translation. ... So maybe I have built myself up to use whatever parts that I need at the appropriate time.

When asked about how she identifies herself, given that she admits to being able to readily change cultural scripts, she emphasised that she identified herself as Chinese:

> Now I think ... I am Chinese. ... [Even when I am in Britain] I am a Chinese. ... [When] I am in someone else's society, I do believe that when you are in Rome, you do as the Romans do ... That's how I integrate ... Chinese means ... Confucianism and the culture, I accept that, I believe in that ... because Confucianism is inherited. You don't question, you see. I don't believe that men and women are always equal in the world. I always felt that ... in the boardroom, at least 80 to 90 percent are still men. Why is that so difficult? First of all, they don't treat you as an equal. You have to work doubly hard and still not get to the level of the man. So is that equality? No. But then you just accept it, I just accept it ... and that's why I think of myself as more Chinese, even though I am educated overseas, I've lived overseas, fundamentally I think I'm still very Chinese.

When asked whether she would say the same thing had she continued to live in Britain, she replied that she would do what the British do, but that this does not mean she would be British, because she would still be Chinese at a 'fundamental level'. She saw herself as neither Hong Kong Chinese nor Chinese-Singaporean, but a Mainland Chinese, because China is the origin of Chinese people and Confucianism.

Cheryl's construction of her trans-national *habitus* shows that she layers the importance of several cultures in her identity, with Confucian Chinese culture being the most central, and Western culture the most peripheral. Her model coincides, to some extent, with the social networks in which she was seeking to maintain and establish herself at the time of the interview, that is, her family and her Cantonese colleagues. Her perceptions of the disadvantages that would come with trying to work in Britain had a strong influence on her decision to return to Hong Kong, where she believes she has the best and most flexible career prospects. However, she said she also partially distinguishes herself from her Cantonese colleagues by pointing out that she feels a stronger attachment to Mainland China. She explained that many of her colleagues only visit Western countries when they go on holidays, whereas she always goes to Mainland China.

In terms of combining elements rooted in different cultures into a trans-national *habitus*, Cheryl's account indicates that when she adopts elements from a new culture, it does not deny the validity of the cultural elements she has already acquired. As she emphasised, she keeps the different cultures separate by grouping them into a hierarchy in her *ha-*

bitus. She emphasised that Chinese culture is, and always has been, the core of her identity, and that this became stronger when she lived in Hong Kong. She has acquired elements from other cultures, and uses them as assimilating cultural capital for social interaction, but keeping such cultural capital peripheral in her *habitus* did not lead her to experience strong contradictions between the various elements from different cultures, as she indicated in her views on gender equality.

Developing a Trans-National *Habitus* with Little Cultural Capital

The second case study looks at Celine, who returned to Hong Kong in 2007, after having already worked in the territory from 2004 to 2006. Celine was born and educated in Singapore, and in 1998, at the age of 33, she moved to the US to pursue her postgraduate studies in Chinese linguistics. She did not enjoy her studies, and started teaching instead. Although she found she was familiar with American culture and explained that she did not experience any culture shock, she found little that attracted her to American culture, which she found unexciting. Nevertheless, she stressed that she appreciated the openness of her American working environment, especially the fact that she had some control over her work and was consulted about her views. For example, she commented about her transfer by her American employer to Beijing in 2002 as follows:

> You know what my American boss told me before I went to Beijing? ... My American boss told me: 'Feel free to suggest anything and feel free to tell me what you think we are not doing well and come up with better suggestions. We want a fresh pair of eyes to look at things. So feel free to bring up anything that you feel can be done better.' ... There was a lot of mutual respect ... They respect you and they will consult you. They will listen to you, and that's very important. But this process does not always occur in Asia.

Being a specialist in Mandarin made her feel close to her colleagues in Beijing. She explained: 'There are a lot of things that we have in common that we can talk about'. However, she emphasised that:

> When it comes to work practice, management style, how you run an office, working culture, I am closer to the Americans ... Work culture [in China] is very different. But we speak the same language, share the same history, so there is this part. It's your heritage. It's your heritage that bonds. But when it comes to how

you work, and how they run the society, it's different from where I came from. It's different from Singapore, it's different from America. But there is this heritage that binds us together so closely.'

Her knowledge of Mandarin and her interest in Chinese culture brought her acceptance in Beijing, and she appreciated the fact that she could share and develop her knowledge of China, which she felt she could not do in Singapore or the US. Celine had grown up with both Chinese and Western culture in Singapore. She attributed her familiarity with Western culture to her schooling, although she started her schooling in the Chinese language. Migration has rendered her already multicultural *habitus* more trans-national by adding cultural elements that she picks and chooses. These additions were not intended to be cultural capital to access social and economic resources. Instead, she chose new social networks and new economic pursuits through migration to fit her evolving interests.

For personal reasons, she moved to Taipei in 2004, but changing circumstances and a certain amount of discontent with her work forced her to return to Hong Kong that same year. In 2006, however, she felt she had few prospects for promotion and was feeling overworked, so she accepted an offer of employment in Singapore. However, she found it difficult here to adapt to the management style, explaining that:

> If I had never left Singapore, I wouldn't have questioned certain things that were done in Singapore. ... So when I came back, I would question why it is done this way. At least in my workplace, sometimes it was frustrating. And it's especially disappointing because it's my own country, my own home, and I was supposed to feel comfortable at home, but I wasn't ... People expect you to behave like them. They will always take you as a Singaporean and they will not take you in a different way, even if you have been away for so long. So they expect you to behave differently, to behave like them.

She then accepted an employment offer in Hong Kong, and returned to Hong Kong in 2007. She explained that her friendships with the Chinese people in Beijing, Taipei and Hong Kong were based on a common heritage, which she likes to strengthen by living in these places. She said that she is not connected to her friends in Singapore in this way. However, when asked to name the *one* place where she feels the closest to the people, she replied:

> It's hard to compare. I am definitely close to the Chinese-Singaporeans, but for the reason that it is my country, we share the same upbringing, education, we have a common history. But with the Chinese in Beijing, Taiwan and Hong Kong, we share something that is different than what the Chinese-Singaporeans can share with me. This is the Chinese culture, the Chinese heritage … With Chinese-Singaporeans, the common thing we share is Singapore, but not Chinese culture.

Migrating for intellectual reasons, yet needing to access economic resources, led to contradictions in Celine's trans-national *habitus*: She increased her knowledge of Chinese culture while rejecting the 'Chinese work ethic', and she sought employment that emulated 'the American work ethic' while rejecting American culture in most other regards. Moreover, she found that the new cultural elements she liked, and with which she came into contact because of migration, were not totally absent in Singapore, but were insufficiently developed. But, she also stressed that the Chinese-Singaporeans whom she met while studying Chinese at university in Singapore are still her best and closest friends. She admitted that living in several societies had made her quite critical and stressed that she does not wish to exclude the possibility of living in most of them again. These contradictions between cultural affinities and her affinities with people indicate that Celine's construction of trans-national *habitus* cannot be characterised strongly by a wish to construct new cultural capital in order to access social and economic resources. Rather, it is her wish to realise her cultural interests that explains why and how she changes her *habitus* through migration.

Maintaining Core Networks, Avoiding the Development of a Trans-National *Habitus*

The final case study is of Thomas who began his tenure in Hong Kong in 2002. He is 42 years old and is married to a Chinese-Singaporean woman. They have a young daughter. His Singaporean employer transferred him to Hong Kong for a temporary assignment. This stay is inscribed in Thomas's migration history, which started in 1965 when he moved as an infant from Singapore to Malaysia. He returned with his family to Singapore in 1970 for his education. He started primary school, had an 'idyllic childhood' in Singapore, successfully completed his university studies, and joined a charity organisation. When he was 30, that organisation asked him to work in an orphanage in Sri Lanka for two years. Thomas saw this posting as an opportunity to gain international exposure and to see 'a bit of the world'. He reported that he

had no difficulties adapting to life in Sri Lanka. He had learned some Sinhalese in Singapore, which he needed because English was seldom spoken in his new surroundings. Perhaps the fact that he was doing charity work among children, for a limited time only, and for a Singapore-based organisation, meant that he did not have to assimilate very much in order to gain social acceptance. Thomas did not seek to access economic resources in Sri Lanka. He enjoyed learning about Sri Lankan history, which became cultural capital in relation to Sri Lankans and also, later in relation to another Singaporean employer, who valued such knowledge.

Thomas insisted that living in Sri Lanka did not change how he experienced Singapore upon his return. He considered this lack of change as proof of his view that all people, regardless of their cultures, are fundamentally the same:

> People are just people. They have their needs, their wants, their desires. At the end of the day, we are all sort of equal, there are sorts of common standards of humanity: Joy, sorrow ... Emotions are not different from one ethnic group to another. So, in this sense, all human beings are the same.

Upon his return to Singapore, Thomas joined an employer who sent him for subsequent postings abroad, each one lasting several years. He thus chose the lifestyle of a serial sojourner, judging that the advantages of learning about different cultures and places would outweigh the disadvantages for his family of having to 'relocate', 're-adjust' and 'make new friends' every few years. At the age of 35, he was transferred to Vietnam for two years, and his daughter was born there. He does not believe that living in Vietnam transformed him, and stressed that he regretted that he was unable to learn much Vietnamese. He attributed this difficulty to the fact that he already spoke a tonal language, Cantonese, which he had learned from his parents.

In 2002, when Thomas was 37, he was transferred with his family to Hong Kong. This did not change the fact that Thomas remained firmly rooted in Singapore:

> Each time I return to Singapore, during my breaks, I feel as if I have not left the place at all ... I feel totally at home and comfortable, as if not a day has passed ... [since] I have been away ... I don't see any break, or any sort of dysfunctional aspects, of being, or of having been, away ... There is no sense of dislocation.

As to whether living in Hong Kong linked Thomas more closely to Chinese culture and could thus change how he views Singapore, he commented:

> I do not compartmentalise myself into boxes ... Being Singaporean is not just being Chinese. You have certain characteristics that come from the fact that you come from a region which is in South East Asia ... It's not that my current posting to Hong Kong has made me feel more Chinese. I don't think that has happened at all.

Living abroad has reportedly not changed Thomas, and the interview yielded no evidence indicating that he has constructed a trans-national *habitus*, in the sense of changing his lasting disposition. In addition to gaining economic resources, he considers that overseas postings have allowed him to do and learn things that are not so easily available in Singapore, such as hiking in Hong Kong's countryside, or practising a new language. However, these new activities, despite being performed outside of Singapore, have not influenced Thomas' *habitus*.

Bourdieu views the relationship between *habitus* and practice as dialectical, with the *habitus* informing the practice and the practice influencing the *habitus* (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 139). In Thomas's case, there appears to be some disjuncture between *habitus* and practice. For example, learning Cantonese to a 'higher level', and thus learning new ways of saying things, does not appear to have changed Thomas's perception of his identity, nor does he think that learning these new skills has changed his behaviour. Does the fact that Thomas did not see things differently during his tenure in Singapore after his overseas postings mean that he did not change while he was abroad? He responded:

> Maybe this is one hypothesis ... What I'm saying is that the minute I arrive back in Singapore I feel totally at home. I don't feel that I have been away.

Working with the idea that the wish to include new forms of cultural capital is a strong motivation for migrants to construct a trans-national *habitus*, Thomas appears to have had few incentives to build new cultural capital – he has been transferred for temporary assignments abroad by a Singaporean employer who employs only Singaporeans in higher-level positions, and who greatly values the maintenance of a Singaporean identity as cultural capital. Most of Thomas's friends and acquaintances in Vietnam, as well as in Hong Kong, were either Singaporeans or expatriates from other countries who were themselves mostly sojourners, and therefore partially de-territorialised. For example, when asked

whether he would feel at home if he were to return to Vietnam after having lived in another place for a few years, he replied:

> If I were to go back to Vietnam today, I think I would feel a little bit lost, in the sense that many of my friends who were with me are also not native Vietnamese. Many of them are from the ex-patriate community and many of them have left as well ... My circle of friends would have shrunk significantly.

Thomas's social networks, which give him access to the greatest social and economic resources, are firmly rooted in Singaporean culture, and this explains why he had few reasons for wanting to establish insider positions in networks with a different culture. Significantly, his daughter attends the Singaporean International School in Hong Kong.

Conclusion

Singapore's bilingual education policies (English and mother tongue, the latter being either Mandarin, Malay or Tamil) have provided Singaporeans with cosmopolitan cultural capital that they may use to access cultural, social and economic resources in other places. Possessing these skills has enabled Singaporeans to live and work in several societies, meaning that they may change their geographical location to increase the cultural, social, and/or economic advantages they perceive as stemming from migration. Recent scholarship on trans-national sojourning emphasises this new trend in migration (Ley and Kobayashi 2005; Potter, Conway and Philips 2005; Waters 2006). Trans-national migration may change the *habiti* of Singaporeans to the extent that they experience significant differences between themselves and others in their society of origin. The examples of Cheryl and Celine indicate that changes may be stronger when trans-national *habiti* are formed without including strong new assimilating cultural capital when residing abroad.

Cheryl's and Thomas's reconstructions of their trans-national biographies show how they maintained and adopted cultural characteristics in order to gain cultural capital in the networks from which they derived the largest amount of cultural, social and/or economic resources. Cheryl's redefinition of her identity from a Singaporean to a Chinese person took place during her return stay in Hong Kong. She has made great efforts to integrate herself into Cantonese culture and, in some ways, this may even rival the importance she accords her own family. She indicated that members of her family were never all that close. Rooting herself in Mainland Chinese culture does not mean that Cheryl is denying

the validity of her family *habitus*, nor the *habiti* of her Cantonese colleagues. The priority she gave to Confucian Chinese culture largely supports, rather than contradicts, the cultures of the social networks from which she derives her economic resources and significant social resources. She draws on what she defines as British culture in her transnational *habitus* as peripheral cultural capital for work purposes.

Cheryl enjoyed her studies in Britain, but was negative about her prospects for working in Britain. Her ambivalent attitude towards British society may indicate that as a foreign student in Britain, as opposed to being a highly qualified foreign professional later on, she made a different claim to access cultural, social and economic resources located in the UK. People's rejection of her differences may have increased as she became a more serious competitor for economic resources. As a foreign student, she was expected to leave the country at the end of her studies, and she was providing economic resources. She did not have to construct strong assimilating new cultural capital to overcome the barriers blocking her access to cultural, social and economic resources, however. Imagining herself as a candidate for managerial positions with significant economic rewards, Cheryl thought that even large amounts of new assimilating cultural capital would not help her to overcome racial barriers.

Thomas's account of his trans-national biography repeatedly stressed that his *habitus* has remained strongly rooted in Singapore and did not change through migration. Sojourners working during a temporary transfer of employment to another country often experience relatively little pressure to adopt new cultural characteristics (Kong 1999; Yeoh and Willis 2005). The project to increase economic resources through immigration, however, is a strong motivation for assimilating in the workplace (Chang 2001: 12). The value that Thomas placed on increasing his knowledge of other cultures may be an expression of Singaporean cosmopolitan cultural characteristics, and is important for his Singaporean employer. Thomas derives nearly all of his social and economic resources from his relations with people who are firmly rooted in Singapore, namely his family, his employer and his colleagues in managerial positions. He had few incentives to construct new cultural capital.

Celine's account of her trans-national biography stands out due to the fact that her frequent changes in her place of residence were strongly motivated by her wish to increase her cultural resources. She did not intend for her knowledge of Chinese culture and language to become cultural capital that would increase her social and economic resources. Her biography shows that intellectual interest alone can change *habiti*, and that the construction of a trans-national *habitus* does not necessarily need to include strong new cultural capital. Although Celine's interest in Chinese culture originated in Singapore, she found that learning more of the Chinese language made her feel more distant from Singa-

pore, and closer to people in Hong Kong and Mainland China. This closeness was based on sharing a similar way of expressing things. She also developed common ways of doing things in relation to what she defined as the Western work ethic, namely rejecting strong hierarchies and having control over one's work. Through her new cultural adoptions and rejections, she transformed her *habitus*. However, she continued to maintain that her closest friends were still the Chinese Singaporeans whom she met while studying Chinese in Singapore. She emphasised that this closeness is maintained because they spend their leisure time together, as opposed to working together.

This study's characterisation of cultural change migrants undergo in terms of the creation of different types of *habiti* indicates a high degree of diversity in how serial trans-national migration, or repeated sojourning, transforms people on a cultural level. Differences stem from the cultural, social and economic differences of the migrants, their migration trajectories, the reasons for migrating, the different characteristics of different places, and perhaps most importantly, the characteristics of the social networks the migrants maintain and establish. Serial trans-national migration, therefore, is likely to produce highly diverse experiences of cultural change.

Note

SINGAPORE AS TRANS-REGIONAL CONDUIT

11 Indian Media and the Lure of 'Uniquely Singapore'

Faizal bin Yahya and Arunajeet Kaur

Introduction

India's rise as an economic power in the post-Cold War era has led to the emergence of a burgeoning Indian middle class. The growing affluence of this Indian middle class has meant their recognition as significant consumers in the global capitalist markets for retail, fashion, luxury items and tourism. As tourists they have been pitched to replace the Japanese as the stereotypical, 'most sought after' vacationer due to their propensity to be big spenders at tourist destinations. The Singapore Tourism Board (STB) has been quick to capture the potential of the Indian middle classes as tourists, which reflects, among other things, Singapore's drive to embrace trans-regionalism. A number of STB offices have been established in the four major cities of India to organise publicity events on the Indian subcontinent to market 'Uniquely Singapore'. These efforts have paid off. India has steadily become one of Singapore's main sources of tourists. However, the increasing number of Indian tourists to Singapore cannot solely be attributed to the STB's efforts. This paper argues that there are two other significant factors that have had an impact on the increased influx of Indian tourists to Singapore. First is the increasing influence of Indian media; film (in particular Bollywood) and television on the subcontinent as well as globally, through the intermingling of Indian local and global 'location shooting' has fuelled the imagination of the Indian middle class to travel more widely. Secondly, the economic acceleration of India timed with the advent of the global knowledge-based economy era has led to the Indian government giving increased attention to the Indian diasporic communities around the world as well as acknowledging the transnational lives of Indian professionals. This has encouraged Indians from the subcontinent to visit destinations with prominent Indian diaspora communities as much as it has encouraged Indians in the diaspora to reconnect with the homeland.

Indian Inbound Tourists to Singapore

Today's Asian tourists are increasingly playing an influential role in tourism development because of their rapidly improving income levels, increasing access to competing airlines, new air routes and more relaxed travel regulations. Most prominent in this regard are Indian tourists who are now among a middle class that numbers 300 million strong, which enjoys a rapidly increasing disposable income that is projected to increase from US$468 in 2000 to US$17,000 by 2050. While leisure travel may still be considered a status symbol for the majority on the Indian sub-continent, it is estimated that some 25 million Indians will engage in tourism over the next few years. The increasing significance of the Indian tourist is made obvious when we see the rising number of travellers to Singapore (see table 12.1). Indeed, today's Indian tourist is adventurous. This could be attributed to the higher disposable incomes and changing mindsets the middle-class Indian now enjoys. Besides increasing incomes, airfare has become cheaper, hotels are offering big discounts and travel loans are available on easy instalments. All credit cards issued in India are valid internationally and the annual foreign exchange allowance for an outbound Indian tourist is $10,000 compared to the $2000 in the 1990s and the meagre $500 issued every three years in the 1970s and 1980s (Khanna, IBEF). As a result, the demand for off-beat, far-flung destinations, adventure tourism, theme holidays and spa and wellness getaways that are usually more expensive to access, is on the rise (Khanna, IBEF). Furthermore, information regarding tourist destinations has become more easily attainable via the Internet and media, creating a more informed Indian tourist with more desires to satisfy.

At the opening of the STB New Delhi Regional Office on 30 March 2005, Lim Neo Chian remarked that India was Singapore's sixth largest visitor-generating market and that STB was confident India's expanding economy will ensure that it remains one of Singapore's fastest growth markets.[1] In 2005, MasterCard's Index of Consumer Confidence confirmed that Singapore is one of the hottest destinations among Indian outbound travellers (*Business Line*, 17 February 2005). The STB's Regional Director, Kang Siew Kheng has attributed the double-digit growth in percentage terms of Indian tourists to the increasing affluence of the middle class and the introduction of low cost carriers.

Table 11.1 *Number of Indian Tourists Visiting Singapore, 2002-2006*

Year	Number of Indian Tourists	Remarks
2002	375,659	
2003	309,423	SARS epidemic
2004	450,000	45% increase
2005	580,000	29% increase
2006	700,000 (figure was based on projections made in 2006)	27% increase

Source: 'Singapore hopes to receive 7 *lakh* visitors from India', *Business Line*, 17 February 2006

Indian tourists stay an average of five and a half days in Singapore and spend between SGD$1200 to $1500 each, 60 percent of which is spent on retail goods, especially jewellery (*Business Line*, 17 February 2005). According to the STB Chief Executive Lim Neo Chian, Indian tourists are the biggest spenders in Singapore. However, the big spenders amongst the Indians are usually corporate chieftains on business trips, rich industrialists or 'yuppie' couples who constitute just 2 percent of the total number of inbound tourists. The Indian tourist experience in Singapore varies according to their income level. The upper-middle-class Indians prefers destinations to Europe, the UK, the US and China (Khanna, IBEF). However they are not averse to a quick getaway to Singapore due to its close proximity and increasingly regular flights between India and Singapore. For example, Singapore Airlines (SIA) alone has more than 50 weekly flights to various destinations to India. This does not even include its subsidiary Silk Air flights. To suit various income types, different tour packages priced at between US $450 to US $1100 that include airfare, accommodations, visas, sightseeing and meals are often publicised (Khanna, IBEF). Most Indian tourists are keen to do some sightseeing in Singapore and are especially interested in the 'Night Safari', the Singapore Zoo and Sentosa, a resort island just south of Singapore (*The Hindu*, 19 December 2004).

Apart from these 'compulsory' sights, other activities that the Indian tourist engages in varies according to budget, as well as his priorities as a traveller. Indian 'yuppie' couples, who are familiar with Singapore as a quick getaway, are excited about the shopping opportunities along Orchard Road, the restaurants offering Western and Eastern cuisine, and such watering holes as 'Zouk' (Bridgesingapore.com, 17 September 2004). Single IT 'techies' are a common sight at the Sim Lim Shopping Centre, purchasing computer paraphernalia or electronic goods. Indians travelling as families are less adventurous, sticking to the familiar sights and sounds as well as vegetarian cuisine at Little India. It is also common for Indians to shop for gold in Singapore, especially from the goldsmiths in Little India as they offer Indian designs and patterns.

The typical profile of the Indian tourist, according to the STB, is between the ages of 24 and 34 and the main purpose of travel is leisure followed by business. It is common for Indians to travel as a family unit, with young toddlers or with aged parents to Singapore as it is considered a safe destination with First-World facilities and amenities. Singapore is especially attractive to Indian couples with 'Double incomes and no Kids – DINKS' (*Economic Times*, 17 April 2006). Besides the short-trip visitors who stay for an average of 5 days, a subsidiary category of Indian tourists who stay longer in Singapore has also emerged. The latter category consists of family members and friends of Indian professional expatriate families who have begun settling more or less permanently in Singapore in 1991. This genre of Indian tourists categorised as 'Visiting Friends and Relatives' (VFR) usually stay for a period ranging from a week to several months. VFR tourists usually stay in the residential housing of their hosts for purposes of reunion, and in the process, pay much less for accommodations. However, the VFR category of tourists are proving to be equally valuable in terms of generating Singapore's economy because they visit various attractions, dine out frequently and purchase gifts for loved ones and friends before returning home. In addition, the VFR tourists are repeat visitors to Singapore as long as they have accommodations among friends and relatives.

The STB has also stepped up its portfolio in marketing Singapore as not just a leisure destination but also an educational hub, thereby classifying students from India as a category of tourist/visitors to Singapore. According to the STB, about 160,000 Indian students seek to study overseas every year, and Singapore would be cost competitive because of its reputable educational institutions and much lower costs of living compared to the US or Europe (Channel News Asia, 7 October 2005). The Singapore Tourist Visitor Centre (STVC) at Chennai, in the state of Tamil Nadu in southern India, established by the STB in February 2004, is a 'one-stop shop' for the dissemination of information to travellers. It actively markets educational opportunities in Singapore (*The Hindu*, 8 August 2004). The STVC centre in Chennai covers Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala, apart from Sri Lanka and Maldives. It promotes its 'Uniquely Singapore' brand by focusing on the Asia Pacific region (*The Hindu*, 8 August 2004). Not all Indian students interested in Singapore necessarily vie for positions in the government-linked tertiary institutions. They are also interested in privately run certification courses, diplomas and degrees offered by universities with offshore campuses based in Singapore. These Indian students/visitors, depending on their course of study, stay anywhere from a couple of weeks, to years with generous vacation breaks. Upon graduation, they rarely attain employment in Singapore's competitive job market, thereby disqualifying their opportunity to integrate into the settled popula-

tion of Singapore and assimilate non-tourist forms of social experiences and consciousness (Urry 2002: 2). These students are a category of tourist/visitors because they display tourist tendencies such as sightseeing and spending on souvenirs and gifts as their departure date approaches. Besides the students who come to Singapore to study, there are also the Indian students who are also part of overseas school trips from India organised by the STB. The STB facilitates five-day tours and a two-week educational tour for students (*The Hindu*, 8 August 2004). Overseas Business Study Missions caters to both organisations and individuals and form part of Singapore's aggressive attempt to attract Indian students (*The Hindu*, 8 August 2004).

STB and the Indian Tourist Market

Earlier mention was made of the 'Uniquely Singapore' brand, which was launched in 2004 by the STB. The STB believes this branding strategy, was good for more than 9.4 million tourists by the end of 2006. This guarantees approximately SGD$12 billion in tourism expenditures, an expected improvement over the 2005 figure of SGD$10.8 billion. To achieve this target, efforts to increase the influx of Indian tourists have been extensive. In late 2005, STB projected a growth in tourism from India at between 11 and 12 percent, a two to three percent increase over the previous year's growth rate (*Business Standard*, 25 August 2005). India is considered a serious tourist market for Singapore and this is reflected in the fact that the STB has offices in India's key metropolitan cities such as Chennai, Delhi and Mumbai (Lim 2005) and it is still expanding its network into secondary cities like Punjab, Gujarat and Maharastra (Bridgesingapore 17 September 2004). According to STB's area director for West India, Edward Chew, the plan was to target first-time tourists in other cities and towns but at the same time to reposition Singapore for the more seasoned traveller in the metropolitan areas.

Road shows, educational fairs and exhibitions have been launched in Chennai, Delhi, Kolkatta, Mumbai, Bangalore and Hyderabad to not only showcase Singapore as a travel and tourist destination, but also as a business hub that is ideal for conferences and networking opportunities as well as an education and healthcare hub (*Triparthi*, 23 October 2004). The STB organised a two-day educational road show on 4 and 5 September 2004 to popularise 'Uniquely Singapore' in India (*The Hindu*, 25 August 2004). The STB has also collaborated with Air India and Indian Airlines (*The Hindu*, 19 December 2004), while, at the same time, working on cost-sharing deals with airlines like Jetstar and other carriers for advertising and promotional programmes (*Business Standard*, 19 December 2004).

The STB has taken serious initiatives to promote business tourism among Indian business travellers, which make up less than one-quarter of the total number of Indian tourists. Increased Indian business tourism is due to the changing profile of Indian companies that are becoming increasingly global and seeking to expand their activities in the international market (*Business Standard* 19 December 2004). STB's Area Director for Southern India, Bridget Goh explained that

> top companies from India prefer to go to Singapore where they can conduct business as per needs of the day. It is also the place for business networking and it will give the learning experience as well (*Business Standard* 19 December 2004).

The STB works closely with Indian companies in conducting their business in areas such as the incentive conventions. In this regard, Indian companies may hold their company meetings in overseas locations like Singapore as incentives for their employees. The company personnel invited to these overseas meetings would have their expenses paid by the company. They would also receive free tours of Singapore or admission tickets to various attractions. This is done to ensure that no stone is left unturned in wooing the Indian tourist to Singapore. It is pertinent to note here that the booming influx of Indian tourists to the island republic is not a unique phenomenon (*The Hindu* 19 December 2004). Today's Indian tourist belongs to a class of Indians that profiles itself as the 'Global Indian' (*Triparthi* 23 October 2004). The term implies being a globetrotter as part of an 'urban transnational cosmopolitan class' (Desai 2003: 45). To be sure, the confluence of certain factors such as the economic liberalisation of India, the forces of globalisation, particularly in the advent of technologies such as the Internet and cable television, and the global popularity as well as the reinvention of Bollywood productions to incorporate a more cosmopolitan outlook, has bred a class of urbanite Indians who are no longer insulated from the rest of the world. The middle-class 'Global Indian' has travelled widely not just as a tourist but as someone who is posted overseas because of developments such as India's expanding economy, the establishment of overseas offices to Indian businesses and the global demand for Indian professionals in the IT and financial sectors. He may also have relatives in the settled Indian communities that are part of the wider Indian Diaspora. These developments create the opportunities for the Indian middle classes to engage in fantasy-like wanderlust.

Indian media and Tourism

The effects of the media on tourism have been researched thoroughly by Hudson and Ritchie (Brent and Hudson, May 2006, 387). They came up with four categories by which to approach the topic: 'the influence of film on the decision to travel ... film tourists ... the impact of film tourism on visitation numbers and on residents ... and destination marketing activities related to film tourism' (Brent and Hudson May 2006: 387). In extending these analyses, this paper will attempt to understand how Indian film and television production, especially Bollywood, was basically reinvented in 1991 to reflect the narratives of a cosmopolitan class of Indians, necessitating location shooting in foreign countries, hence fuelling the Indian imagination to travel and increase the flow of outbound Indian tourists.

Jigna Desai has written about the 'New Wave' Cinema, which depicts the narratives of the 'urban transnational class' and the 'new middle class' that has emerged in the South Asian metropolises, especially Mumbai. He agrees with Rachel Dwyer who identifies the new Indian middle class as distinct from the previous colonial and postcolonial dominant bourgeoisie, and describes them as a class of people with their own unique structures of feelings and ideologies. Their fluency and frequent use of English as well as consumption of material leisure goods and services such as food, fashion, travel and high priced commodities associated with the West reflects their global outlook and influence (Desai 2003: 47). Desai explains that this new middle class is an outcome of a generation bred on MTV, 'familiar with DKNY, Blimpie, Nintendo and vacations in Seychelles, coming of age and carving their own public sphere in cultural production and consumption' (Desai 2003: 47).

To explain his thesis, Desai has chosen to concentrate on new low-budget English-language 'independent' cinema. His theses could however be extended to Bollywood cinema which has, since the early 1990s, seen the development of a new middle class of producers, directors, scriptwriters. Artists such as Karan Johar, producer and director of several Bollywood productions such as *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* and, most recently, *Kabhie Alvida Na Kehna*, and Farah Khan, director of the movie *Main Hoon Na*, are representatives of the new urban transnational class of Indian film producers and directors who have successfully transformed Bollywood into the public sphere of the new middle class. Bollywood has a popular reach beyond the urban transnational class and the 23 million-strong Indian Diaspora, extending to the masses throughout South Asia, South East Asia and the Middle East. The content of its films, especially since 1991, are usually centred on the lives of primarily the urban transnational urbanites and the diasporic middle class (Desai

2003: 53). The box office successes of films produced by Karan Johar under the Yash Raj banner are a clear testament of this. They are renowned for depicting the lives of Indians in the West, implying the fascination and allure of foreign lands for the Indians versus by-gone Indian attitudes to travel and crossing the 'Kaala Pani'.

Indian media, as constituted by Bollywood cinema and cable television channels such as 'Zee' and 'Sony' television, have been responsible for reducing the distance between the migrant and the homeland and between the Indian viewer and the foreign, and by popularising Bollywood themes that encompass dual-nation settings, which includes such box office successes as *Dilwale Dulhaniya Le Jayenge* (1995), *Pardes* (1997), *Kabhie Kushi Kabhie Gham* (2001) and recently *Krrish* (2006). The characters are depicted as having links with both India and abroad. These films, which have required location shots in countries such as Scotland, England, the USA and Singapore, serve to familiarise the middle-class Indian audiences with lands that could be potential holiday destinations. Most Bollywood film producers hope to emulate the huge box office earnings of the above-mentioned films, and continue to produce narratives that either describe dual nation settings or even a complete overseas setting, depicting the lives of the Indian diaspora communities, such as *Neal 'N' Nikki* (2005) and *Kabhi Alvida Na Kehna* (2006), or narratives that would appeal to the cosmopolitan Indian's imagination, such as *Rang De Basanti* (2006) which was popular amongst Indian audiences in the US. Bollywood producers plan their productions for audiences outside of India, because they now account for around 65 percent of a film's total earnings (David 2006. 50). Even in bigger budget Bollywood productions that do not depict dual-nation narratives, overseas location shooting as backdrop to song sequences has become almost compulsory. While the target audience for Bollywood producers might be overseas, the subsidiary effect on the Indian middle class has been tremendous in inciting a desire to travel and participate in the fantasy and glamour that Bollywood is famous for.

Secondly, the proliferation of India's cable TV channels has led to the creation of a media community comprising of Indians home and abroad as well as enthusiasts of Indian entertainment. The global availability of Indian cable TV channels implies a global community of Indians subscribing to TV channels such as 'Zee TV', 'Sony Entertainment' and 'Star plus' telecasting travel documentaries, overseas location shoots of its soaps and cookery shows, as well as talent quests that not only help to 'sustain the triadic relationships that migrants forge between their countries of birth or ancestry, countries of settlement and the wider settlement' (Gillespie and Cheeseman 2002, 127) but also incite a curiosity to travel, by Indians in the diaspora, back to India in search of roots while the Indian outbound tourists travel to various

spaces of the diaspora to experience points of similarity and differences. In his article entitled 'Zee TV-Europe and the construction of a pan-European South Asian identity', R.K. Dudrah acknowledges the potential of Indian cable TV channels as an integrative and community building mechanism (Dudrah 2002: 164). He quotes founder and Chief Executive of Zee TV, Subhash Chandra announcing 'his ... global vision for the channel, wherein it would be a way of "networking" South Asians with each other around the world ...' (Dudrah 2002: 164). This process of 'networking' would inevitably lead to communications and travel.

Singapore as the 'product in placement' in Bollywood

Film tourism is a new field in tourism research. Hudson and Ritchie attempt to define film tourism as tourist visits to a destination or attraction as a result of the destination being featured on television, video, or the cinema screen (Brent and Hudson 2006, 387). The destination featured in visual media therefore receives the same treatment as any other product placement, which Balasubramaniam explains as the planned entries of products into movies or television shows that may influence viewers' product beliefs and/or behaviours favourably (Brent and Hudson 2006, 387). The Bollywood film industry offers tremendous potential in the product placement of a destination, since it reaches a large audience in India and abroad. David Martin Jones examines the phenomenon of popular Indian films being shot on location in Scotland. He focuses primarily on three Hindi film productions, *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* (1998), *Kandukondain Kandukondain* (2000) and *Pyaar Ishq aur Mohabbat* (2001). In assessing the impact of these films being shot on location in Scotland, Jones highlights three major ways in which Bollywood films bring money into Scotland; through location spending, the box office in Britain itself, and tourism (David 2006: 51).

STB has enjoyed successes in promoting Singapore through film tourism. Previously, the STB enlisted the assistance of the National Geographic Channel Asia (NGCA) to share 'Uniquely Singapore' with millions across the globe (New Release National Geographic Asia, 22 November 2004). Three world-renowned NGCA photographers; Steve McCurry, Sisse Brimberg and Michael Yamashita toured Singapore to document its unique cultural and ethnic blend. The product, according to the NGCA's Vice President for Sales and Partnerships, Avinash Himatsinghani, is a series of short vignettes whereby each photographer gives his or her personal travel experience in Singapore in the areas of food, history, art, nature or architecture (New Release National Geographic Asia, 22 November 2004). In response, STB spokesperson and

Assistant Director of STB, Dawn Phang, acknowledged the publicity Singapore received as a result of the project, 'we are delighted to have partnered NGCA and invited its three award-winning photographers to experience Singapore's unique offerings. Through their lenses, we hope to share Singapore's unique blend of culture, tradition and modernity with the rest of the world' (News Release, National Geographic Asia, 22 November 2004).

STB has also assessed and tapped into Bollywood's potential as a valuable medium to promote Singapore. An STB spokesperson revealed that Bollywood represented the best way to showcase Singapore to Indians, given the passion Indians have for film (New Release National Geographic Asia, 22 November 2004). In May 2004, Singapore hosted the International Indian Film Academy (IIFA) awards. The Bollywood industry produces some 700 to 800 more films than Hollywood each year, and has a strong following worldwide, especially among Indians overseas. When hosting the IIFA awards in 2004, the STB also organised worldwide contests for Indian cinema fans to win travel and accommodation packages to visit Singapore and catch their favourite film stars in action at the Samsung IIFA Awards. The Samsung IIFA Awards was the highpoint of the IIFA weekend in Singapore. The IIFA awards attracted not only Indian movie stars but also international stars. According to STB's Chief Executive Lim Neo Chian, 'Today marks the beginning of a glamorous and glitzy weekend extravaganza, where our friends of the Indian community will be treated to a myriad of enriching and unique experience that Singapore has to offer' (Singapore Tourism Board, Press Release 5 March 2004). Various events organised around IIFA were also meant to promote Singapore overseas. For example, the forum 'Globalisation of Indian Cinema' was a key highlight of the IIFA event and drew representatives from foreign embassies, terrestrial, cable and satellite broadcasters, filmmakers, distributors and exhibitors.

The STB has launched a concerted campaign to use India's movie industry and its Bollywood stars to promote Singapore in a mutually beneficial way through its 'Film in Singapore' scheme. This strategic move is linked to Singapore's own ambitions to be a media hub and to resurrect Singapore's thriving film industry of the late 1950s and 1960s (Venthakumar 2005). However, the interest in Singapore as a film location died when Bollywood producers shifted their focus to exotic and European locations. Some headway was made when the Hindi films *Rakht* (2004) and *Vaada* (2005) were in part shot in Singapore (Lee Boon Yang, Minister for Information, Communications and the Arts, IIFA Academy Award Forum, 21 May 2004). To create a bigger impact and attract more producers and directors to use Singapore as a location for their films, the STB introduced a new scheme of providing major

film funding to encourage foreign producers to showcase Singapore in their film and TV projects. The US$10 million project encourages film-makers and broadcasters to film and produce movies and television pro-grammes in Singapore (*Business Line*, 7 July 2005). Funding for the scheme was planned for disbursement over three years and subsidised up to fifty percent of the qualifying expenses incurred during shooting in Singapore (*Business Line*, 7 July 2005). Film director and producer Rakesh Roshan, who participated in the IIFA Awards of 2004 fell in love with Singapore and collaborated with STB for his upcoming project – *Krrish*. Rakesh Roshan had won the Best Director's Award for *Koi Mil Gaya* (2003), the blockbuster prequel to *Krrish*, and is renowned as a re-liable producer and director with several film hits under his belt. Ra-kesh Roshan was attracted to the clean and efficient environment in Singapore, which he considered as a radical departure from the pedan-tic bureaucracy in India. Filming overseas also meant that production costs would be cheaper given the tight schedules and cooperation re-ceived from the foreign government (Bhardwaj, *Asia Times*, 19 May 2006). The STB then struck a deal with Rakesh Roshan in July 2005 to film *Krissh* in Singapore. In September 2005, filming for the movie started, starring the director's son, Hrithik Roshan, former Miss World Priyanka Chopra and popular actors Rekha and Naseeruddin Shah.

The film *Krrish* is about a man with super powers inherited from his father after being touched by an alien – or Jadoo. The scenes shot in bustling Singapore are contrasted with the peaks of the Himalayas, where the protagonist, Krrish or Krishna, is from. He comes to Singa-pore because of his girlfriend who is a Singaporean Indian working at an international television network. She coaxes him to reveal his super-natural powers to further her career, but the truth is only revealed when he repeatedly takes on gangsters, purse-snatchers, rescues children from a circus fire, and a mad scientist who wants to build a machine that predicts the future. Singapore is effectively portrayed as a sunny and colourful place in some song sequences as well as action scenes. The super hero 'Krrish' glides off the peaks of buildings at Raffles Square, Shenton Way and the Singapore River, whilst the villain's main laboratory features the 'durian' architecture of the Esplanade. Viewers of the film agreed that the director had, in effect, featured Singapore ex-tensively as a bright, oriental and attractive site juxtaposed with an un-realistic portrayal of a country where gangsters, street fights and purse-snatchers were a regular part of the landscape. The producer and direc-tor's also portrayed Singapore as primarily a Chinese country that fea-tures buskers who are, at the same time, also kung-fu street artists. Several action sequences with Chinese triad-like gangsters inaccurately portray Singapore's multicultural landscape.

Krrish was the first film shot in Singapore under the STB's 'Film in Singapore' programme. The STB facilitated the logistics support and ground requirements for the filming in Singapore. In addition, the STB also secured locations and ensured a hassle-free shooting schedule for Roshan, which included liaising with the traffic police to ensure that streets were blocked off for the filming such as Robinson Road and the East Coast Parkway. Over 100 cast and crew members from India, China and the US were in Singapore during the shoot and some 100 additional local cast members were also hired.

The various locations in Singapore that were featured in the film included the National Library at Bugis, the Esplanade Theatres, Clifford Pier, Pulau Ubin Island, Changi Airport, heritage sites such as Chinatown and the Singapore Zoo. The film stars and director abstained from being interviewed by the press until the film was launched in June 2006. The film crew also enforced strict security during the shooting of the film because 60 percent of the content was based in Singapore. There were concerns about the silence of the Bollywood stars and whether this had undermined the publicity that the STB desired. According to Ken Low, the Acting Assistant Chief Executive (Brand and Communications) at the STB, the strategy had been to create a stronger level of awareness of Singapore's destination brand overseas through the film medium (Singapore Tourism Board, Press Release, July 2006). Therefore, by enforcing a media silence, mystery would be added to the film as part of the marketing strategy of the film when it was released.

Singapore is not the only destination that has assessed the capacity of Bollywood and its reach in luring middle-class, outbound Indian tourists. As a film location, Singapore faces regional competition in wooing Bollywood to its shores. According to Kiran Nambiar, country manager of the New Zealand Tourism Board, Bollywood films are the best platforms to create awareness and interest amongst viewers who could be potential tourists. The Thai tourism agencies also believe that there is a huge potential for attracting Indian weddings, visits by friends and relatives, and the traffic of young people and students. In 2004, about 300,563 Indians visited Thailand, which was an increase of 30.26 percent over 2003 (*Bangkok Post*, 9 January 2006). The Tourism Authority of Thailand has also opened up an office in India and is also focusing on attracting movie productions. Malaysia's Deputy Prime Minister Najib Tun Razak has also said that Malaysia's tourism sector has benefited from the Indian film industry, 'Indian movies have made Malaysian scenes and landmarks – including our Petronas Twin Towers, Langkawi and Penang famous in the film business and attracted Indian visitors to Malaysia' (Xinhua News Agency, 7 June 2006).

Global acceptance of Bollywood films has convinced the Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTB) that it should enhance its campaign for attract-

ing Indian visitors and promote the country as a location for Bollywood filming (*Business Line*, 2 October 2004). The HKTB had also organised a Bollywood Movie Magic evening, which is attended by Bollywood celebrities and HKTB's travel trade partners. According to HKTB Executive Director, Ms Clara Chong 'the synergy between Hong Kong and Bollywood presents a platform to promote Hong Kong to Indian travellers. We are confident that Bollywood-linked marketing can work well in India, where movie-going is a national pastime' (*Business Line*, 19 August 2004). What evidence is there that connects media and films as an influence on travellers? Ms Lara Chong said that, 'our surveys have shown that 14 percent of the visitors were interested in Hong Kong movie scenes and our promotions built around the country's movies have already proved successful in other Asian markets' (*Business Line*, 2 October 2004).

Indian Diaspora and Tourism

Following the advent of Indian independence, the Nehru government excluded non-resident Indians (NRIs) and the Indian diaspora from policy making. It was only in the 1990s that the Indian government began to take the economic potential of its diaspora seriously. With the economic reforms of the early 1990s, the Indian government, emulating China's relationship with the Chinese diaspora, hoped that the Indian diaspora would invest heavily in India. After a long-standing ambivalence towards the diaspora, the Indian government took several initiatives to reintegrate the diaspora, based upon the recommendations of a High Level Committee appointed in 2000. In reviewing the status of people of Indian origin (PIOs) and NRIs, the Indian government decided to host two annual events to recognise its relationship with the diaspora, the *Pravasi Bharatiya Divas* (Family of India Days) on 9 January of each year and the *Pravasi Bharatiya Samman* (Family of India Awards) (Kevin 2004). This recognition of the diaspora was, significantly enough, timed with the occurrence of two other phenomena to bring about a greater integration of the diaspora – firstly, the rise of Knowledge Based Economies (KBEs) has created a global demand for professional Indians particularly in the ICT (Information and Communications Technology) finance sectors; and secondly, the proliferation of technologies such as the Internet and cable network television.

As the Indian diaspora moves towards greater integration, this increases the potential for tourism, not only from the perspective of the diaspora back to India in search of its roots but also amongst the destinations that have significant Indian communities. Coles and Timothy explore tourist activity within the diaspora by primarily highlighting the

flow of tourism from the diaspora back to the 'homeland'. Coles and Ti-
mothy explain that the main motivation for tourism to the homeland is
'ethnic reunion' – the desire to delve into family histories, motivated by
familial piety or ethnic pilgrimages to ancestral homes. In discussing
the distinct assemblages of characteristics and attributes, the temporal
and spatial experiences of the Indian diasporic tourists to India, the
contemporary geographical juxtapositions and the social and cultural
constructs of different groups within a diaspora, Coles and Timothy do
not make explicit that this interplay of sameness and difference in ex-
periencing an ethnic identity also encourages the curiosity to travel
(Coles, Tim and Timothy 2004: 12).

    For instance many Indian tourists interviewed in Little India (Seran-
goon Road, Singapore) admitted that they were there to experience the
familiarity of Indian cuisine whilst marvelling at the differences in cul-
tural practices and varying modes of consumption of Indian merchan-
dise. For this reason, Little India has been transformed, with the locus
of Indian tourist activity centred at the Tekka Market, Buffalo Road and
Campbell Lane areas, which attract mainly local Singapore Indians.
Mustafa Centre, a shopping complex located at Syed Alwi Road, has be-
come an iconic symbol and beacon for Indian tourists through word of
mouth in India and elsewhere in the Indian diaspora. Owned by Indian
Muslim millionaire Mushtaq Ahmed, Mustafa Centre has over 90,000
items on display spread over 75,000 square feet and is open 24 hours
daily, seven days a week. Mustafa Centre is not only a famous depart-
ment store but it also has a supermarket, pharmacy, jeweller, money-
changer, hotelier, travel agency and post office. In order to capitalise on
Mustafa's popularity as a tourist attraction, businesses have mush-
roomed along Syed Alwi Road to cater for the needs of tourists as well
as to provide alternative choices to the merchandise being sold at Mus-
tafa.

    The need to experience 'sameness and differences' within the dia-
spora has also led to the mushrooming of various ethnic Indian restau-
rants, vegetarian and non-vegetarian, in Little India. These restaurants
offer the comfort of familiarity of cuisine from back home in India
while at the same time allowing the Indian tourist to experience the
variety of local Indian fusion dishes, such as Roti Prata and Mee Gor-
eng, which are not available on the Indian subcontinent or any other
part of the diaspora except in Malaysia and Singapore. Indian tourists
are also attracted to Indian enclaves around the world to experience var-
iations in the consumption of traditional Indian products. For example,
Singapore is a favourite site for Indians in the purchase of gold items,
which are revered by many buyers as appropriate religious and custom-
ary objects. Indian tourists claim that they prefer gold items from Sin-
gapore as the quality is certified according to the Singapore Institute of

Standards and Industrial research (SISIR) standards, which is valued in India because of the guarantee it offers on the purity of the gold purchased.

Coles and Timothy also state that the temporary return of expatriate migrant workers account for tourism back in the homeland. The reverse is also applicable. In the early 1990s, when Singapore was keen to attract Indian foreign talent, Singapore became the host of 90,000 NRIs,[2] the singles or married couples with young children who work in Singapore. It is common for their parents, relatives and friends to visit them often either to get together or to help in difficult times when, for instance, there is a newborn in the family and the mother-in-law or mother flies to Singapore to be of assistance to the new mother. Young NRIs are also frequent hosts to relatives and friends who might be heading through Singapore on their way to another destination. By offering accommodations, Singaporeans extend the stay of those passing through Singapore. This makes it possible for a segment of the Indian middle class to be able to afford travel without having to pay for lodging. As has already been mentioned, these tourists usually stay longer and make return trips. They are at their own leisure to visit tourist sights and enjoy the local cuisine as well.

Conclusion

India has shed its previous insularity. The economic reforms that were introduced in the early 1990s have created an affluent Indian middle class that acquired a cosmopolitan identity. Indian media reflects the wants, desires and lifestyles of this middle class, which is continues to grow as India continues to rise as an economic power. Moreover, the rejuvenated links India now maintains with its diaspora makes Indians an ever more globalised people. These developments have generated a wave of Indian tourists who are keen sightseers and have the means to be big spenders. By embracing the ideal of trans-regionalism, Singapore, with its STB, is riding atop a high wave of Indian consumerism. The profits reaped from this growing market, as shown above, have been increasing steadily over the years.

Notes

1   Speech by Mr. Lim Neo Chian, 31 March 2005, Deputy Chairman and Chief Executive, STB at the opening of STB Regional office, New Delhi.
2   http://indiandiaspora.nic.in/contents.htm (Accessed in August 2006).

12   Localising the Global and Globalising the Local: The Global Households of Filipina Trans-Migrant Workers and Their Singapore Employers[1]

Janet M. Arnado

Introduction

The world-system perspective conceives the household as an 'income-pooling unit, with boundaries subject to continuing change ... [depending on the] pressures [derived] from the cyclical rhythms of the world market and from the state machineries' (Wallerstein and Smith 1992: 253). Due to the malleability of its boundaries, the definition of household does not depend so much on the structure as it does on the nature of relationship which 'impose[s] sharing obligations' (Friedman 1984: 46). This income-pooling arrangement, according to Kathie Friedman (1984: 51), has two types: one is 'a long-term household with life-time obligations and rights ensuring exchanges among' members; and the other is 'a short-term household with less cohesive networks between fictive kin, "friends", neighbours, and co-workers that exist for specific purposes and for a shorter duration'.

Drawing from the world-system theory's notion of the household as an income-pooling unit (Smith, Wallerstein, and Evers 1984), I examine the formation of 'global households', by which I refer to transnational, multiple, shifting, and paradoxical households, within the context of global capitalist economy.[2] The unprecedented flow of global South-North labour migration in the period of heightened globalisation has engendered the restructuring of households. Conventionally, co-residentiality and kinship constitute the boundaries of households. The changes in the world economy and continuing accumulation of capital, however, have had their toll on households, which have become 'increasingly commodified', as Immanuel Wallerstein (1984: 21) puts it, 'from the preparation of food, to the cleaning and repair of home appurtenances and clothing, to custodial care, to nursing care, to emotional repair'. Wallerstein further suggests that with the increasing commodification of everyday life has gone a decline in co-residentiality and kinship as determinative of the boundaries of household.

The growing income gap between core and peripheral nation-states facilitates the importation of labour power for house and care work in

the core region from peripheral countries. Labour needs in wealthy nations are translated into work opportunities for unemployed or underemployed breadwinners in poor nations, often at the expense of their families who must be left behind. In the case of Filipinos, efforts to support their families have sent parents, sons, and daughters away from their homes, as they sought greener pastures in affluent countries. Along with numerous labour opportunities in wealthy nations, cheap travel and better access to information technology, have allowed 'family and kinship ties' to move from a largely local to a global scale (Al-Ali and Koser 2002: 3), resulting in the formation of global households that challenge the conventional notion of 'household'.

This chapter will seek to examine two global households – one based on the conventional arrangement of co-residentiality, and the other on a transnational dispersed kinship group. The co-residential global household involves a multi-class, multi-ethnic, and multi-citizen membership. Thus, core-periphery relations are experienced right within a middle-class household in the First World, through the incorporation of foreign domestic workers. In this sense, the global household is a site where gender, ethnicity, and class-identity formation of these foreign domestics is embedded within the discourse of citizenship. On the other hand, the kin-based global household has its members physically separated by the geographic differentiation of the First World and Third World. The first scenario localises the global as it depicts the 'global village' (Brecher and Costello 1994) inside a dwelling, while the second globalises the local as a household that has become de-territorialised outside the dwelling unit and into the global village. These paradoxical notions of global household are embedded in the everyday lives of foreign domestic workers, who are marginally integrated in First World households that they live in, while at the same time reproducing their kin households in the geographic Third World through remittances and long distance intimacy (Parrenas 2005). Ironically, these women have transcended traditional gender roles by becoming breadwinners in their own households, only to perform traditional gender roles for pay in other households beyond their national borders.

Moreover, the present chapter will also delve into core-periphery relations within co-residential households, addressing the impact of citizenship on power dynamics between employers and domestic workers. Likewise, it seeks to examine the 'global householding' of transmigrant workers towards their families that have been left behind. The consequence of global capitalist expansion on households, involving the close range interaction between citizens of the First World and Third World within a household versus the long-distance reproduction of trans-nationally dispersed families will also be discussed.

Materials for this research are drawn from seven months of conventional ethnographic fieldwork in Singapore, involving face-to-face interviews and participant observation with Filipina domestic workers and a few employers. In addition, I performed what Nicole Constable (2003) calls 'virtual ethnography' in an online forum among Singapore employers, as they discussed issues related to their lives with foreign domestic workers.[3] In the succeeding pages, I will refer to this online discussion forum as the Forum.

Forty-three life-history interviews with Filipina domestic workers and four interviews with employers were conducted. The interviews, half of which were voice recorded with the informants' permission, ranged from 45 minutes to four hours per session. Thirteen informants underwent one or more follow-up conversations through telephone, SMS messaging, and face-to-face meetings, where I accompanied them as they did their shopping, went to the disco, religious service, picnic, and watched their wards in the playgrounds. To supplement interview data, I conducted participant observation in public places inhabited by foreign domestic workers. Ethnographic sites include places frequented by Filipinas on Sundays, such as the Lucky Plaza mall along Orchard Road, Singapore Botanic Gardens along Cluny Road, and various churches. I also included public spaces explored by Filipina domestic workers on their workdays, such as schools, playgrounds, and markets. To obtain the voices of Singapore's employers, I followed the discussion in an online discussion forum specifically intended for employers of domestic workers in Singapore. The text data consisted of 110 threads from over 100 members and guests. Employers' narratives have been edited for style and brevity; many of them employ Singapore English and SMS-style of writing, which highly abbreviates spelling. To protect the identities of domestic workers and employers, pseudonyms will be used in this paper.

Constructing the Global Household

The kin-based notion of the global household is often conceptualised in the literature as 'transnational household' that entails the analysis of the placement of family members in different countries, as well as the moving back and forth of members and remittances to these countries.[4] Michael Douglass (2006) employs the term 'global householding' when referring to the nurturing practices of family members back home while employed in another country. The term 'householding' itself was coined by Fernand Braudel Center's household project, to refer to 'the practices that compose this sharing [of obligations] and ensure continuity (Friedman 1984: 46)'. In the context of this chapter, I use the term

'global households' to refer to a specific dual positioning of overseas do-
mestic workers in the dispersed kinship (sending) and co-residential
(receiving) global households. Global households incorporate the defini-
tion of transnational households as having dispersed membership, but
global households also include multiple and shifting co-residential
households in which trans-migrants have acquired membership
through their occupation as houseworkers, and in a few cases, as wives.
In line with Chaney's description of the 'people with feet in two socie-
ties' (1979, 209 in Basch, Schiller, and Blanc 1994), the global house-
holding of overseas domestic workers involves having their feet and
hands in at least two different and otherwise unrelated global house-
holds.

The term global household is also adopted to refer to multiple house-
holds simultaneously occupied by migrant workers. That is to say, they
are concurrent members of two global households – their dispersed kin-
ship household and the co-residential household. Furthermore, two of
my informants have indicated that they were members of three global
households in three different countries, the third being the household
in which they have acquired membership through marriage. In Amy
Soriano's case, this household in a third country is a newly and symbo-
lically occupied household in Canada.[5] Thirty-two-year-old Amy had
been working for almost two years in Singapore, when her Canadian
boyfriend of six months visited her, at which time they went through a
civil wedding ceremony. Amy secured a few days of leave from her job
and stayed in a hotel with her husband. A week later, her husband re-
turned to Canada to process her immigration papers, while Amy re-
mained in Singapore to complete her two-year contract, doing house-
work and attending to two preschool children. Even while in Singapore,
Amy began her householding activities with her Canadian husband
who had a teenage daughter by his ex-wife. She performed 'transna-
tional homemaking (Lan 2006)' by visiting home appliance stores, look-
ing for items she would buy once she reached Canada. At this point,
she collected bed sheets and curtains – small items she could bring
with her. Besides her households in Singapore and Canada, she sup-
ported a household in the Philippines, inhabited by her sibling and her
adopted sister, for whom she had resolved to provide a college educa-
tion. She and her sister divided the mothering role in which she as-
sumed financial support while her sister performed the physical and
psycho-emotional care.

While the kinship household is deemed to last a lifetime, the receiv-
ing co-residential global households are shifting, short term by nature,
and coterminous with a person's employment contract. To provide per-
petual support to their kin households, Filipinas continue their domes-
tic work, moving on to another household in the case of irreconcilable

differences with their employers. In each and every instance, when a Filipina migrates she undergoes an adjustment process, forgetting her previous knowledge and adapting to the new housework and carework methods of her new employer.

In their years of domestic service, ranging from less than a year to 22 years, my informants have not only shifted households within Singapore but also across countries. Of the 43 informants, 33 have changed employers and nine have worked in two to three countries, such as Dubai, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. All in all, Filipinas perform paid and unpaid homemaking duties in their global households – to include the one they left behind in the Philippines, their paid work in Singapore, and for a few, another household in a third country.

Core-Periphery Relations Within the Singapore Household

Core, semi-periphery, and periphery are positions in the new capitalist world system that structure the international division of labour and power relations among nation states (Wallerstein 1974). The core region gains the most from this arrangement, and expropriates much of the capital surplus generated by the periphery through unequal trade relations. The periphery is composed of countries with weak central governments, largely controlled by other states, relying on 'coercive labour practices'; while the semi-periphery is situated between the two (Modern History Sourcebook 1997). Simplifying the variations among the three, Valentino Piana (2004) defines the core as countries that are in a dominant position, the semi-periphery as countries that are dominant relative to some while dominated by others, while the periphery comprises countries that are dominated on all levels. Consequently, the core region is composed of countries with power and wealth, while the periphery is generally impoverished. The core is also known as the First World, while the periphery is known as the Third World. Detailing aspects of core and periphery, Immanuel Wallerstein and Joan Smith (1992) indicated that besides the positioning of nation-states in the world economy, core and periphery are observable *within a country*, through their 'core-like' and 'peripheral activities'. In addition, they argue that, 'Core and periphery are not discrete entities. They are relational antinomy. Core-like and peripheral processes are opposite sides of a single coin. Peripherality exists only in relation to, and by contrast with, coreness' (Wallerstein and Smith 1992: 255).

Viewing Wallerstein and Smith's theses as a continuum, I consider countries such as Singapore and the Philippines as representations of the core and the periphery, respectively, in the Southeast Asian context. Singapore's GDP per capita is the second highest in Southeast Asia,

while the Philippines' GDP per capita is one of the lowest in this region (Asian Development Bank 2007). Because of these two countries' differential positions in the international division of labour, the Philippines has become the supplier of labour while Singapore has provided the demand in keeping with the global pattern of international labour flows originating from the less developed countries and directed to satisfy the labour needs of industrialising countries (Sassen 1984: 33). The Philippines, whose main export is labour, has an economy that is kept afloat by remittances, pegged at US$12.7 billion in 2006 (National Statistics Office 2007) from more than 11 million overseas Filipinos (Population Reference Bureau 2003). In contrast, Singapore is beset with a limited labour supply and relies on foreign talents and low-wage workers to fulfil its goal of rapid modernisation. Singaporean women who used to withdraw from the paid labour force once they began childbearing have been called upon by the state to remain productive in the labour force to meet the challenges of a continuously growing economy. Thus, here lies the paradox – while the state has encouraged women to be active in the paid labour force, it has also called on them to sustain their reproductive roles in the domestic sphere by increasing fertility (Pyle 1997; Lee, Campbell, and Chia 1999). Accentuating the problem is the increasingly nuclear family households, which now constitute 80 percent of Singapore's population (General Household Survey 2006). Given the diminishing support of the already minute extended households, one in six of Singapore's households relies on foreign domestic workers (Ministry of Manpower 2006). As a whole, the population of 4.3 million Singaporeans and permanent residents depend on 160,000 foreign domestic workers from neighbouring countries (Transient Workers Count Too 2006) to help Singapore's women meet the challenges of an industrialised country, while sustaining the reproductive requirements of their households (Yeoh and Huang 2000).

In observing transnational societies, Abram de Swaan (2002: 20) explains the dialectics between the global and the local, or between the universal and particular vocabularies. The presence of foreign domestic workers in Singapore households allows the experience of global village right within the house, or in many cases, condominium and HDB flat where the majority of Singaporeans reside.[6] By looking into core-periphery relations within these households, a localised context of global dynamics, of human relations mirroring relations of power among nation states, may be observed. The nature of core-periphery dynamics between domestic workers and their employers is an interaction of class, ethnicity, nationality, and gender, embedded in the discourse of citizenship.

The Philippine government's hailing of its overseas workers as modern-day heroes is only a euphemism. Given the nature of state control

that is imposed on the Filipina workers in Singapore, these women are in effect modern-day slaves who are called heroes by the Philippine government for sacrificing their lives for their country and families. The uprooting of Third World women from their own households and having to leave their own children behind cannot be called a free choice. Rather, it is a matter of survival brought about by their country's inability to provide adequate jobs for them. Without consideration for their educational attainment and skills, these women are lumped into the category 'Filipina', which has become a term used in many countries to indicate the domestic worker.

With the abundant labour supply from its neighbouring countries, Singapore is unhindered in its establishment of the employment terms of foreign domestic workers. In Singaporean households, foreign domestic workers do not have the same freedom as Singapore's citizens and permanent residents. State restrictions on FDWs in particular, and blue collar workers in general, include the following: exclusion from the Employment Act that protects workers; absence of a legislated day off and a minimum wage; curtailment of reproductive rights by the prohibition of pregnancy and marriage to Singaporeans; as well as a being restricted from becoming a citizen of Singapore. The call for a mandatory day off per week was rejected by the government, because it would bring 'inconvenience' to the employing households. In contrast, no consideration was given to the round-the-clock inconvenience borne by foreign domestic workers, except to say that they be given 'adequate rest', which remained undefined (Reuters 2006). Consequently, only about half (21) of my informants had a regular day off each week.

In addition to these deprivations, we notice the daily incidents of 'second-class' treatment that foreign domestic workers daily face in their co-residential households, which can vary enormously, depending on the ideologies of their employers. My informants report that Singapore's Chinese employers are the most discriminatory towards their 'maids' (as they are popularly called in Singapore), while Western expatriates and Asians with exposure to Western egalitarianism generally provide better working conditions. Most informants with expatriate employers enjoyed higher pay rates, a weekly day off, and a lighter workload.

The movement of foreign workers into Singapore households has transformed the lives of Singaporeans in both positive and negative ways. The female employers who were interviewed admitted that they benefited enormously from the burden of housework being lifted from their shoulders. Employer Melissa Wong used to live with her husband in her in-laws' apartment.[7] She was expected to wake up early in the morning to mop the floors and prepare everyone's breakfast before she herself left for work. Upon her return from work, she would do her

household's laundry. Her husband, on the other hand, was not expected to help with any household chores. After they moved into their own apartment and employed a foreign domestic worker, her domestic burden was eased, as she now only needed to provide detailed instructions for her domestic helper.

Antagonism is inherent between employers and domestic workers due to their hierarchical placement in the social stratification of nationality, ethnicity, class and gender. Their ethnic differences create some dissensions, with Singaporeans socialised in a highly disciplined social order while Filipinos are reared in quite the opposite way. Concerning their upbringing, Singaporean employers often attempt to create a disciplined domestic helper. Many domestic helpers initially resist, but acquiesce over time. Other problems result from varying cultural definitions and practices pertaining to cleaning, food preparation, and childcare.

Besides the obvious class gap between employers and domestic workers who live together in the same housing units, citizenship, with all of its rights and vulnerabilities, also shapes their First World-Third World relations. Ulrich Beck (2006) has argued that a specific citizenship no longer defines one's rights, because, in many cases, cosmopolitans or expatriates enjoy almost the same rights as citizens. This is, however, not the case for non-citizen, low-wage workers in global cities such as Singapore. Filipina domestics come to the country as non-citizens with work permits that make it virtually impossible for them to acquire Singaporean citizenship or to marry Singaporeans. The position of cosmopolitan domestic workers at the lower end of the labour market excludes them from the citizen-like perks enjoyed by their counterparts in the upper segments. Furthermore, their exclusion from the Employment Act, which protects workers, increases their vulnerability (Yeoh, Huang, and Gonzales 1999). Consequently, some employers tend to abuse their authority over their employees, not only treating domestic workers as second-class individuals but also subjecting them to subhuman conditions. One employer in the Forum justified her second-class treatment of foreign domestic workers as follows:

> Maids should not have any hand phone! Period. No ifs or buts! No exception. What do they need hand phones for? They are here to work, not to socialise ... Furthermore, maids are second-class and they deserve to be treated as second-class.

This employer prohibits her maids from owning mobile phones not because the phone leads to poor work performance but simply because she is a second-class individual. Part of the 'second class' treatment of domestic workers is to make them work longer hours and follow difficult procedures despite the availability of labour-saving technologies in

Singapore. The use of these labour-saving devices is regulated by some employers who demand that their domestics hand wash their clothes in order to save on electricity. There were also cases where employers demanded elaborate cleaning rituals to reflect the maids' lowly position in the household. One employer in the Forum would watch her maid clean the toilet and insist that her maid 'brush the toilet floor on her hands and knees.'

Other employers shape the disposition of their domestic workers into unattractive unisex objects. Priscilla Bondoc's employer, for example, prohibited her from wearing her chosen working attire.[8] Instead, her employer bought plain white shirts and knee-length shorts for her everyday use. Many employers in the Forum prohibited their domestic workers from wearing nail polish and insisted that their maids keep their hair short. They also worried about their maids getting too chummy with their spouses. Thus, sexy clothing is regularly prohibited. It is as if these (mostly female) employers fear that if their domestics appear in the least attractive, it will threaten their marriages and undermine their position as employers. Another employer in the Forum, Jenny Teh, expressed her views this way:

> My previous maid is extremely good to my hubby. She even wears translucent shorts and sways in front of my hubby. Now she's out! ... Maids are maids. They are deprived of our 'luxury' as they wanted very much to replace the Madams ... They cannot resist this temptation and are willing to pay a high price for it. We can't blame them. But we have to protect our family from breaking up.

Jenny's narrative again justifies the employers' second-class treatment of their domestic workers, because maids are maids and thus should not have access to the employers' luxuries. These 'luxuries', which are reserved exclusively for the employers and their families, include hair-styling, clothing, and body care, as well as leisure time and the freedom to move around. Furthermore, most employers bring their maids to restaurants and other dining situations to extend their household duties beyond the confines of the home. A common spectacle in restaurants is of a family dining while the maid looks after the children. These maids may have eaten at home beforehand so that they can concentrate on their task, or perhaps they have brought a home-packed meal to be consumed later, or is quickly provided a cheap meal by her employers. Other employers restrict their maids from leaving the flat or entertaining visitors while they are out. A number of employers in the Forum told of how they locked their maids in when they went off to work, leaving a key in a sealed envelope that domestic workers can only use in

emergency situations. All of the restrictions that employers impose on their foreign domestic workers are meant to protect their families from potentially abusive workers.

The narratives of Filipina domestic workers reveal that they internalise a great deal of their peripheral positions in the household. Many have grown satisfied with their jobs and have accepted the restrictions imposed upon them. Those who become dissatisfied resign and look for other employers. As Sandra Aldana told me, satisfaction does not arise from the kind of employer but from one's own disposition.[9] As she noted, 'it's all about getting used to things.' Sandra's Singapore-Chinese employers, a business executive and a stay-at-home mom, treated her well. She referred to them as 'Ma'am' and 'Sir', while the children called her 'Auntie'. The entertaining of visitors inside her employer's home was prohibited, along with the use of the telephone, which she voluntarily avoided out of respect for her employers' property. The social boundaries are sometimes breached, because of their physical proximity. Being at home, her female employers spent a lot of time with her, and she became emotionally close to her from listening to her stories and even offered her the advice to take it easy, both work-wise and emotionally. Sandra acknowledged that she was in Singapore to earn money; she worked hard but did not allow others to step on her dignity. When her employers scolded her, she listened, but she always talks back when her employers are being unreasonable. Talking back is certainly one of the many pet peeves that employers in the Forum have about Filipina maids.

To avoid confrontations, most domestic workers remain passive when their employers scold them. When the scolding becomes excessive, however, they will often answer back. While many employers prefer their maids to have short hair, most of the Filipinas I met at the Luck Plaza had long hair. In the Ladies Room, they talked about how they liked letting their hair down after having to keep it in a ponytail all day at work. A few complained about being forced to cut their hair short. Most of these women also owned mobile phones, which they used in the mall. One domestic worker told me that her employers did not allow her to own a mobile phone, so she kept it hidden from them.

Global Householding in Diffused Kinship Households

International migration has inevitably transformed the Filipino family household structure. Family members used to meet everyday for meals, prayer and leisure activities, among other things. With the ever-increasing number of international migrants, many families are either left with one or no parents. What used to be co-residential family households in

the Philippines are now becoming increasingly globalised in response to the forces of the integrated world economy. Based on Department of Foreign Affairs data from 2001, some nine million children under the age of 18 years had parents working overseas (*GMANews*, 2007). When the minimum wage no longer serves as a living wage for families in poor countries, and when overseas low-wage work presents an alternative to this dilemma, men were the ones who often left their co-residential units to 'provide' for their families. More recently, however, the feminisation of international migration, spurred by the increased demands for women workers, has further restructured Filipino families. The Philippine Overseas Employment Administration reports that women accounted for 70 percent of newly hired overseas Filipino workers between 2000 and 2005 (ABS-CBNnews 2007). Women who are traditionally considered the 'light of the house', are now often the main breadwinners, while struggling to maintain their roles as the light of the house, which they perform trans-nationally and in symbolic ways.

An increasing number of Filipino families are supported by non-resident breadwinners who care for other households overseas. My informants have worked outside the Philippines for an average of ten years, and an average of eight years in Singapore. While Singaporean households often treat them in a 'second-class manner', Filipino households regard their family members who have worked as domestic workers overseas as pseudo-citizens of Singapore. They may not have achieved citizenship and may have remained maids all these years, but they have lived in a 'First World' country and have maintained somewhat middle-class lives in terms of food, housing, language usage, and global travel. Some have also managed to win the hearts of their employers and the children who literally grow up in their care. Through the years of domestic service, they often acquire what many trans-migrants develop, a sense of 'multiple belonging' (Christiansen and Hedetoft 2004). While they clearly see themselves as domestic labourers, they also view themselves as cosmopolitans, having travelled to many countries, stayed in first-class resorts, and flown in business-class with their employers. It usually does not matter that they had to work while their employers relaxed; the point was that they have stayed in these expensive resorts, flown business class, and visited new places.

Besides their breadwinning skills, Filipina trans-migrants are often also held in high esteem by their families because of their privileged experience of cosmopolitanism through their work as domestic helpers. When they are 'back home' with their Philippine families, they rejuvenate their lost bonds. Reunited with their families, they are treated as important members. Their suggestions are considered as orders because of their financial contributions to the family. One informant noted that, 'when I am home, I am treated like a queen.'

Trips that bring them back home, however, are rare among Filipina domestic workers as they only receive two weeks vacation every two years, assuming they have completed one contract cycle. This benefit varies based on arrangements made between employers and employees. Because of the short vacations, their actual time spent with their families is very limited. Pepita Valmoria is the eldest daughter of a large family who provided financial support for her 12 younger siblings. In her 18 years of service with a single employer in Singapore, she had only visited the Philippines four times to attend significant events in her family's life, such as funerals and weddings.[10] Pepita is single and 51 years of age and never got married in order to better provide for her many siblings. Pepita preferred to stay in Singapore for the most part, preferring cash to plane tickets and vacation money for practical reasons. She noted that, 'when you do not have a family of your own [i.e., spouse and children], you do not want to go home anymore'. This is a common sentiment shared by other single domestic workers as well.

By contrast, Judith Gomez is a single parent who raised her six children via her 14 years of service as a domestic worker and was returning home annually, paying half of her airfare while her employer shouldered the other half.[11] Even though she could not save as much as those who sacrificed their vacations for money, she found it necessary to bond with her children.

Besides their remittances and occasional telephone calls, migrants' intimate relationships with their families are often destabilised by their long absences overseas. But as other scholars have already pointed out (i.e., Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997) motherhood has been reconfigured to deal with the changing roles of women, who decide to serve as the familiy's breadwinners and who have had to pass on their nurturing functions to other caregivers. Despite the distance, however, the women do try to perform their roles as parents in a transnational way. Mobile phones – a 'time-space compression gadget' as Harvey (1990) puts it – is a key to maintaining long-distance relationships with their families. Of my 43 informants, only one did not own a mobile phone. Ingrid Calo spent Singapore (S) $100 per month on international calls.[12] Another single parent, Ingrid would call her son everyday to wake him up, remind him to go to church, and seek updates about his girlfriend, his studies, and his nutrition. As Ingrid noted, 'It just feels like I am in the Philippines. Although my son cannot see my face, he hears my voice all the time.' Ingrid spent a lot of money on her calls to compensate for her absence.

Having gone through the hardships of growing up in a single-parent family, another interviewee – Ivy Canlas – was determined to keep her family intact and provide an education for her children.[13] Consequently, she called her family several times a week to check up on them. While

she had no marital problems, she rarely called her husband in order to save money. Her children were the most precious things in her life, and considering the high costs for phone calls to the Philippines, she preferred using the money to talk to her children rather than her spouse. During her weekly short chats with her daughters, she fulfilled her long-distance mothering, advising the girls to do well in their studies. 'Sacrifice. Bear what I provide for you and study hard' is what she always told her children.

Because international calls are expensive, most of my informants limited their voice calls. Instead, they utilise 'SMS' (or text messaging) to communicate with their families because the costs are comparable to those in the Philippines. Through Smart and Globe innovations, sending a text message or SMS to the Philippines costs less than two pesos. Families in the Philippines pay only one peso per text message to Singapore. The affordability of text messages has allowed for the daily exchange of basic information among household members. Clarissa Licayan, an ex-factory worker in Manila, had been working in Singapore for 14 years.[14] Because of Singapore's restrictive policies regarding intimate relationships, Clarissa had remained single even though she was already 38 years of age. Eager to find a life partner, Clarissa resorted to cellular phone technology and found a 'textmate' back in the Philippines. Because of her Pinoy-Globe SIM card, which is readily available at the Lucky Plaza mall in Singapore, she and her boyfriend in the Philippines only pay a minimal amount to send each other text messages, practically the same amount or cheaper than a local SMS.

Indeed, support services such as improved communications technology, affordable door-to-door delivery services, and cheap air travel have helped sustain relationships between distant family members. All of this facilitates daily interactions, allows for the development of transnational homemaking, so that distant mothers can do the grocery shopping for their families and visit during vacations. Strong family ties and extended household structures are other enabling components that aid families of domestic workers abroad. Close families enable the care of children left-behind to be assumed by extended family members. In return, these guardians benefit from remittances sent from overseas. Of the 24 mothers in my pool of informants, eight indicated that they had left their children with their mothers or mothers-in-law, eight with no one but themselves, three with their siblings, three with their husbands, one with another relative, and one with hired help. Studies have shown that the presence of extended family members in a household 'strongly mitigated' the social costs of labour migrations by parents on their children (Bryant 2005: iii).

Support services are necessary, as there seems to be a trend towards a permanency of kinship-based global households. Return migrants, for

instance, refrain from remaining too long in the Philippines; instead, circular migration has become increasingly common. Among those I interviewed, 17 were circular migrants, having returned to the Philippines for various reasons and then returned to overseas employment as determined by financial necessity, family trouble and the desire to earn more. More than half have been away from the Philippines for ten years or more and about one-quarter of them have lived overseas for 15 or more years. Sandra Aldana has worked in Singapore for four years, in addition to six years of domestic employment in Taiwan and Hong Kong. Extensive years of overseas employment afforded the construction of her house in the Philippines and support of her children through school. Forty-year-old Sandra earns S$500 per month, a little more than the starting rate of dollars S$320 for Filipino domestics in Singapore. Despite her relatively high salary, Sandra confessed that she was unable to save anything for her own retirement. Registering for the Social Security System is a good move, but she never had an extra penny to pay for the monthly contributions. Although she did not have savings, she viewed her material assets in the Philippines as concrete products of the hardship she endured for the sake of her family. Having good relationships with both her family in the Philippines and her current employer, she planned to work in Singapore for as long as her French employers remained there. She wanted all her children to become professionals so they would not experience what she went through. Sandra's case is one example of those who have endured long years of separation from their families to provide for the children's needs. With barely six years of formal education, Sandra could never find employment in the Philippines that could pay for her family's needs. Thus, she decided to remain overseas.

These enabling conditions also have their negative consequences on their children and marriages. The absence of parents has caused psychological and social problems among their children. Reviewing the literature about children left behind, John Bryant (2005) reports that psychological difficulties are more likely when mothers migrate overseas and leave their families behind. Studies have shown that children becoming estranged from their parents and view them only as sources of gifts and money, or of children blaming problems such as delinquency, drugs, and premarital sex on parents' absence ... There are claims that children of migrants have difficulty making decisions, because they are used to having two layers of authority in the family (first their caregivers and then the absent parent). There are claims that children of migrants are spoiled and wasteful or lonely and resentful (Bryant 2006: 6).

Prolonged separation also commonly results in either marital break-ups or the redefinition of marital relationships. Of the 24 informants who had ever been married, five were separated, six were widows, while

13 have remained married. To keep their marriages intact, many of my informants tolerated the extra-marital affairs of their spouses. They viewed their tolerance as practical, knowing they could not perform their conjugal duties. At 38, Becky Indang had gone through major trials in her life, having been married and fulfilling her roles as a teenage mother at the age of eighteen. In 1991 when she was 22 years old, she left for Singapore leaving her husband and a little daughter behind. Soon after her departure, she realised that her overseas work had created a rift in her marriage. Neighbours, friends, and relatives disclosed her husband's extra-marital affairs, which she did not feel was all that surprising, given their social circumstances. Knowing that she could not fulfil the sexual needs of her husband, she tolerated it, as long as the relationship remained in the domain of bodily sex. Upon her return to the Philippines four years later, she discovered that her husband had abandoned her and their only child. He left them to be with his mistress. Becky was in a difficult position as she had the intention of working in Hong Kong for six months. Her nine-year-old daughter, Virginia, was left alone. Virginia felt abandoned by her parents, and she later began neglecting her studies and quit school after graduating from high school.

While transnational mothering may work in some cases, the examples of Becky and Virginia prove that there is another side as well. Many trans-migrant workers often end up being part-time wives and full-time servants. Although tormented emotionally, most Filipina domestic workers acquiesced to their partners' extra-marital activities. Many were resigned to the fate of being 'transient wives', performing their conjugal roles when they are with their spouses, and allowing the latter freedom to have illicit relationships in their absence. Even those who are not yet aware of the activities of their partners often prepare themselves for the worst.

Conclusion

Because of the nature of their work, trans-migrant workers need to find a balance between their co-residential work lives and transnational family life at different stages of their overseas stints. Newcomers often find it hard to concentrate on their work because of adjustment issues and separation anxieties from the families they have left behind. Return migrants fail to settle down on a long-term basis in the Philippines due to various financial difficulties, relationship problems, and their 'addiction' to overseas work. Long-time domestics working for one employer had become quite attached to their employing families and could not easily take their leave.

Following Friedman's typology involving short-term and long-term households discussed earlier, the co-residential global household of domestic workers in Singapore is meant to be a 'short-term' household. However, for one-quarter of my informants, it has indeed become a long-term engagement, ranging from eight to 20 years, the latter being longer than the number of years those children in Western societies ordinarily live with their parents. Despite the contractual slavery involving second-class treatment, state restrictions, and separation from their families, many Filipinas have remained in Singapore. They have accepted the restrictive and marginalised lives in Singapore as well as the notion of remaining domestic workers throughout the productive years of their life. Despite the years away from their children, trans-migrants in their late 40s and early 50s who can otherwise afford to be with their children, often do not quit their jobs in Singapore. Accustomed to the transnational arrangement with their families, long-time domestic workers shared their fears of early retirement from their overseas jobs. A never-been-married informant who had been given a special place in her extended family because of her financial contributions verbalised this fear: 'How will my relatives treat me when I no longer have a steady cash flow?' Another commented, 'I don't want to be a burden on my children.' These anxieties are not without justification. A case in point is a recent newspaper report of a 59-year-old domestic worker who finally returned to the Philippines after nine years in the Middle East. No one was at the airport to celebrate her homecoming and her nieces and nephews whom she supported through college were nowhere to be found. Without a penny in her pocket, she ended up staying temporarily with a group fighting for migrant workers' rights (*Philippine Today* 2002).

In examining the consequences of trans-nationalism on families, Elisabetta Zontini (2004) found that prolonged separation from their families triggers 'considerable suffering' for the transmigrant women but, at the same time, these separations 'increase [the] freedom and control over their time and income.' Similarly, Zontini noted that children left behind benefit economically from their mothers' migration but at the same time, suffer from long-term separation. A foreseeable danger of global households occurs when trans-migrant workers, particularly those with 20 years of employment in a single household, *no longer suffer* from living away from their families and become content living with their employers and distantly supporting their families. Their workplace becomes their home and their home becomes merely a beneficiary of their charity. This is problematic because of its impact on family cohesion and old-age social security. Marriages are often too difficult to sustain when partners are separated this long, and children may grow up not really spending much time with their mothers. Sec-

ond, domestic workers are unable to become citizens and the absence of legislation that provides for retirement benefits for foreign domestic workers offers no other option for these workers other than to grow old and have to return to the Philippines. It will be a challenge to renew relationships with family members when they are already retirees. If this phenomenon does occur, it is important for trans-migrant workers to go home financially prepared to be able to support their own retirements. Thus, the governments of the Philippines and Singapore and other aid agencies must assist domestic workers to save up for their old age, by controlling their contributions to their families and engaging in forced saving schemes.

The global household is an interesting site to examine, especially regarding the ways in which processes of globalisation affect the microdynamics and how the abstract is made concrete in the domestics' everyday lives. This chapter has identified the transformation of households as a consequence of global capitalist economy. These global households include the restructuring of households from largely co-residential families into global households, involving internationally dispersed families and co-residential citizens from First World and Third World nation-states. The paradox of these global households highlights the transformation of social relations in a highly globalised society. What we have here is a 'condition of postmodernity (Harvey 1990)', a decline of clear-cut definitions of some social categories, such as households, housewives, marriage, and mothering. For instance, housewifery is now shared by the world's women; children obtain care at home not only from their own parents and relatives but also from foreigners who represent a different culture. Some marriages are considered intact even though spouses neither live together nor espouse fidelity to each other; some women become transient wives, fulfilling their roles only during biannual breaks from their work. Mothering becomes possible through technological innovations such as mobile phones, the Internet, and door-to-door delivery services. Finally, foreigners are absorbed into the homes and allowed to take care of employers' infants and children. Indeed, global capitalist economy has established new forms of institutions and roles replacing the old ones.

Notes

1   This article is made possible through the support of ASIA Fellows Awards by the Asian Scholarship Foundation and Asia Research Institute where I was Research Affiliate. I would like to thank the Filipina domestic workers and employers who shared their life stories with me.

2   Petra Weyland (1997: 85) has employed the term 'global household', which she referred to in the context of moving households of global corporate executive men, who were as-

signed in one global city and then another, in a two-to-five-year period, accompanied by wives and their domestic workers.

3 To protect the identities of the Forum members, the name of this online discussion forum and its URL have been withheld.

4 Some of the authors who employed the term 'transnational household' in their work include Gardner and Grillo (2002), Thomas-hope (1988), Castaneda (2005), Parrenas (2005), and Willis and Yeoh (2000).

5 Amy Soriano was interviewed on 7 January 2007. Our conversation started at the Lucky Plaza Mall along Orchard Road, and continued as we hopped from one mall to another. Since then we would follow up on each other by phone, and later through e-mails when she eventually reached Canada.

6 HDB or Home Development Board is a public housing project in Singapore.

7 Employer Melissa Wong was interviewed on 7 January 2007.

8 Priscilla Bondoc was interviewed on 14 November 2006.

9 Sandra Aldana was interviewed on 11 November 2006.

10 Pepita Valmoria was interviewed on 4 March 2007.

11 Judith Gomez was interviewed on 3 December 2006.

12 Ingrid Calo was interviewed on 28 January 2007.

13 Ivy Canlas was interviewed on 11 November 2006.

14 Clarissa Licayan was interviewed on 14 January 2007.

13   Raffles Hotel Singapore: Advertising, Consumption and Romance

Chris Hudson

Introduction

While much ink has been spent on the life and career of one of Southeast Asia's most celebrated colonial administrator and the founder of modern Singapore – Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles – there is a paucity of literature regarding the processes which contributed to the reification of the ideas of luxury, prestige and exclusivity associated with his name (Solomon 1997; Madden 2003; Aljunied 2005). This chapter attempts to fill this gap by examining the creation and sustenance of the Raffles brand in Singapore. A number of landmarks, botanical specimens, streets, buildings, businesses and institutions have been named after Raffles. There is Raffles Museum, Raffles City Convention Centre, Raffles Hospital, Raffles Tailors, Raffles Investment Group, Raffles Holdings, and the list goes on. The Raffles Institution, and Raffles Junior College are known as perhaps the two best schools in Singapore, whose notable alumni include former Prime Minister, Lee Kuan Yew. The Raffles Hospital is one of the best in Singapore; and of course, there is the Raffles class on Singapore's national airline, which offers the ultimate in luxury air travel. It is the Raffles Hotel, however, that has maintained a prestigious international reputation for more than a century. This is the site around which the romance of an essentialised and exoticised East has emerged.

The branding strategy of the Raffles Hotel invokes nostalgia for a decadent and self-indulgent colonial past. It regularly recalls 'the legend of Raffles' and the hotel's 'legendary' status. An examination of the ways in which this legend has been created and what it means necessitates the employment of the works of Raymond Williams, Jean Baudrillard and others whose theorising of consumption is underpinned by an understanding of the distinction between the use value and the symbolic value of a product. Williams suggests that if as consumers we were only interested in use, then 'a washing machine would be a useful machine to wash clothes, rather than an indication that we are forward looking or an object of envy to our neighbours' (Williams 1980: 185).

One might also make the point that if we were only interested in use, then a comfortable night's accommodation would be enough for us, without the promise that the Raffles 'lifestyle experience' will transform us into 'privileged guests'.

Baudrillard's work on advertising addresses the question of the social logic of consumption where the symbolic outweighs use value. A successful brand name can create a coherent, collective vision of a product through which may emerge its social or symbolic value (Baudrillard 2004: 27). Cronin has encapsulated the role of advertising in this process when she says that advertising acts as an intermediary that can translate products into symbolic social entities, and integrate them into a larger system of people, ideas, practices and institutions (Cronin 2004: 1). Through an exploration of the branding strategies which create a collective vision and integrate symbolic entities into larger systems of meaning – in effect, the brand logic – it becomes possible to uncover what it is that is really being consumed when a hotel is, as Raffles advertising asserts, 'more legend than hotel (Raffles Hotel, Singapore, n.d.).'

Leiss has outlined the complexities and ambiguities inherent in any commodity. Products, objects, things, and increasingly, services, can represent a complex amalgam of the material and the symbolic and become 'material-symbolic entities (Leiss 1978: 84).' Urry, in turn, points out that in the modern economy services, such as those associated with tourism, are now of greater significance than material objects (Urry 1990: 24). The complex relationship between people, commodities and images that constitutes the material-symbolic entity of Raffles is played out discursively in the websites and advertising material and in the books and brochures commissioned by the hotel. Of paramount importance in constructing this relationship is the brand.

After more than a century of expansion, Raffles is now a global chain with seven branches in Europe and Asia currently in operation and a number of others planned. The Raffles chain currently includes: Raffles Grand Hotel D'Angkor (Siem Reap, Cambodia); Raffles Hotel Le Royal (Phnom Penh, Cambodia); Raffles Hotel Vier Jahreszeiten (Hamburg, Germany); Raffles Beijing Hotel (People's Republic of China); Raffles Le Montreaux Palace (Montreaux, Switzerland); Raffles L'Ermitage (Beverly Hills, California); Raffles Resort Canouan Island (The Grenadines). New branches scheduled to open in the next three years are: Raffles Dubai; Raffles Resort Taimana (Tahaa, French Polynesia); Raffles Resort Bali (Indonesia); Raffles Resort Phuket (Thailand); Raffles Resort Da Nang (Vietnam). This essay, however, will focus on the Raffles Hotel in Singapore, the *ur-hostelry*, and the birthplace of the Raffles legend. The Raffles chain offers not just a night in a hotel, but a 'lifestyle' experience through a coherent, collective vision, which has been diffused

from the reputation and branding strategy of the original Raffles in Singapore.

At the Raffles International chain of hotels you can 'seek the good life'[1] (Angkor Wat), find 'elegance and exclusivity ... [and] that inimitable Raffles experience'[2] (Beijing) and discover 'a place like no other where East and West meet in an architectural sense as well as in the vast range of care and treatments available' (Montreux). Its enduring and transferable brand power seems to demonstrate the benefits of establishing a relationship between people, commodities and images and to affirm Baudrillard's point that the satisfaction of needs is outweighed by the importance of the 'social logic of differentiation (Baudrillard 2004).' That logic is, as Baudrillard puts it, not the logic of propositions and proofs, but the logic of fables, and people's willingness to go along with them (Baudrillard 1996, 166). The brand logic of Raffles, designed to maintain its prestige and reputation as one of the finest hotels in the world, depends not on the logic of Reason, but on the logic of Romance. The romance is part of what Ritzer (1999) recognised as the character of enchantment conjured in spaces dedicated to consumption. The Raffles romance emerges from its place in the narrative of Western travellers to Asia, and it lends itself to the construction of an Orientalist fantasy. This same romance, and nostalgic attachment to the past, is still promoted as part of the coherent, collective vision, and is one of the salient features of its brand image today.

On the one hand, as Giddens writes, the capitalistic market with its imperatives of continuous expansion attacks tradition (Giddens 1991: 197). On the other hand, the same imperatives allow it to reinvent and commodify tradition. It is worth recalling here Barthes' (1972) contention that advertising can create modern mythology by investing cultural objects with a range of meanings and connotations. Recognising the mythological status of a commodity is also important in the context of Kellner's assertion that advertising, like myth, can resolve social contradictions, provide models of identity and celebrate the existing social order (1992, 158). The brand is paramount in this process. A brand is more than just a cultural artefact, it is a capitalist institution (Arvidsson 2006). As a parasitic cultural form, colonising other cultural forms, its role is to sustain capitalist ideology (Holt 2006).

Travel and the tourist experience, along with many other opportunities for consumption, are implicated in the nexus between consumption and identity, and are factors in what Giddens has termed 'the reflexive project of the self', that is, the creation and continuous revision of a coherent biographical narrative (Giddens 1991, 5). In Giddens' account, individualism is lodged in the sphere of consumption, and individual self-expression is enveloped by a freedom of individual choice governed by the market. He asserts that: 'To a greater or lesser degree,

the project of the self becomes translated into one of possession of a de-
sired good and the pursuit of artificially framed styles of life (Giddens
1991, 198).' Kellner has argued that one of the functions of advertising
is to sell not only lifestyles, as Raffles branding strategy clearly does,
but also desirable subject positions (Kellner 1992: 167). Arvidsson's
work on branding crystallises the concept even more succinctly when
he says that consumers pay not for the brand itself but for the power to
transform themselves, for what they can *become* with it (Arvidsson
2006: 68).

Branding strategy and advertising for the Raffles Hotel present not
only the promise of a 'lifestyle', but also a narrative coherence with
which the consumer can identify (see Giddens 1991, 199). Raffles co-
herent, collective vision provides a narrative with which the trajectories
of self of potential consumers may converge. This dovetails with Arvids-
son's discussion of the ways in which consumers co-create brands. That
is to say, symbolic value is created by a relationship between brand and
consumer, and it is only when consumers allow a brand to assume a
significance in their lives, that it emerges as a symbolic social entity (Ar-
vidsson 2006, 82).

I begin with an overview of the history of Raffles Singapore and the
making of the legend and explore, in particular, the continuing reitera-
tion of the romance of Raffles and the transformation of travellers' ac-
commodation into a global cultural icon. Two aspects of the branding
strategy of Raffles are the key to the Raffles image. The first is that Raf-
fles guarantees exclusivity. Only a select few can become part of the le-
gend and enjoy the nostalgic experience; its symbolic value – its desir-
ability – is predicated on exclusion. Historically, 'most visitors to Raffles
were rich, rare and energetic globetrotters' (Liu 1992: 55). An integral
feature of the romance is that Raffles has always been imagined as a
place to exclude the plebeian.

The second important feature of the Raffles branding strategy is the
notion of intimacy. Raffles brand logic encourages consumers to ima-
gine themselves in an intimate and personal relationship with the hotel.
The hotel invites consumers to become part of the legend, and charac-
ters in the romance. The trajectory of the self, as described by Giddens
(1991), can then be experienced as ineluctably enmeshed with the logic
of luxury consumption. Both of these features of Raffles advertising of-
fer not only the material but also the symbolic privileged subject posi-
tions. The subject positions of the consumers own making are made
possible by the power of the brand to provide a context of consumption,
a field of experiences and relationships in which the construction of the
subject is made possible (Arvidsson 2006).

The Romance of Raffles – The Making of the Legend

Raffles Hotel, on the corner of Beach and Bras Basah roads, Singapore, was founded in 1887 in a much smaller incarnation than today's Raffles.[3] Since 1899, when Rudyard Kipling encouraged people to 'feed at Raffles (*Raffles Hotel Singapore*, n.d.).'[4] Raffles has undergone large-scale renovations, extensions, modernizations and a series of refurbishments. It was one of the first buildings in Singapore to receive electricity, and had a Grand Marble Dining Room capable of seating 500 people. A large ballroom was added in 1920.

Liu (1992) dates the beginning of the legend to 1904 when the Raffles Hotel began to be known as 'the finest caravanserai East of Suez' (*Raffles Hotel Cookbook*, 2003: 10). In 1905, it was referred to as a global standard of luxury when *The Sphere,* a popular London magazine, called it 'The Savoy of Singapore', and was by then already being patronised by the rich and famous. In 1917, it advertised itself as the hotel that made Singapore famous (*The Raffles Cookbook* 2003: 37). An important element in the construction of the Raffles legend is the catalogue of 'distinguished guests' who have become characters in the on-going romance. Actors, writers, poets, European and Asian royalty, Hollywood celebrities and people famous for being rich figure prominently in the inscriptions of the hotel's history. Celebrated writers include Hermann Hesse, Joseph Conrad, Rudyard Kipling, Noel Coward, André Malraux, Pablo Neruda and James Michener. Amongst many others who have stayed at Raffles were Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks (1921); Charlie Chaplin (1932); Ava Gardner, Rita Hayworth and her husband the Aga Khan, Jean Simmons, the young John Fitzgerald Kennedy, John Wayne (1950s); Hayley Mills, Trevor Howard, William Wyler, Milos Foreman, Otto Preminger, Peter Bogdanovich, Claudia Cardinale, Ben Gazzara, (1960s and 1970s). Members of various royal dynasties who have at different times during the last century stayed at Raffles include the King and Queen of Siam, the Sultan of Johore, Grand Duke Cyril of Russia, Prince Adalbert of Germany, Prince Kan-in of Japan, Sir Charles Vyner Brooke, the last White Rajah of Sarawak, and a number of Indian maharajahs. The important guest referred to most often is, of course, William Somerset Maugham, who stayed at Raffles between the two world wars. Photographs of many of these guests, and other less well-known pre-war glitterati, are featured in the museum on the hotel's top floor.

The Raffles management has long been aware of the selling power of history and romance, and have used them effectively in their branding strategy. According to Liu, it was Franz Schutzman, a Raffles employee in the post-World War Two period who spotted Somerset Maugham's reference to Raffles Hotel 'standing for all the fables of the exotic East' and thereafter they decided to use it in their advertising (Liu 1992: 143).

This phrase has become a very powerful evocation of the romance of Raffles, and such an integral part of the brand logic of Raffles, that it almost never fails to appear in any advertisement or commercially produced discourse about the hotel. To reinforce the association of Raffles with both the famous writer and the romance of the exotic East, Maugham was invited to stay at the Raffles (compliments of Schutzman) and returned in 1960 as an octogenarian. He was given the suite he had occupied 40 years earlier.

The 'Raffles experience' has been generating nostalgia and attachment to tradition since the early twentieth century. The British agent, Bruce Lockhart, returned to Raffles in the 1930s after a 25-year absence only to be disconcerted by its modernisation and a certain loss of old world elegance:

> It was the old Raffles of my youth, but so altered, so re-equipped and so enlarged as to be almost unrecognizable ... when I came to the bathroom my face fell. There, firmly set on the tiled floor, was a European bath of the latest model with hot and cold water complete. The old Siamese jar with its tin-pan for sluicing one's self was evidently a thing of the past. I felt a pang of regret (Liu 1992: 99).

Even in the 1930s, tourists came to Raffles looking for the Raffles legend in the authentic East that they had heard about. One tourist commented: 'We motored in a car of Cook's to the Raffles Hotel; here, I thought was the East that Maugham, Sir Hugh Clifford, Bruce Lockhart and countless others have written about' (cited in Liu 1992: 102).

By 1935, according to Liu, Raffles was no longer merely a hotel, but had become 'an icon for all that was perceived to be romantic and exotic in travel, a symbol for the myths and fables of the East', and was promoting itself as a place that was 'immortalized by writers, patronised by all' (Liu 1992: 99). Advertising may be one of the few discourses left in which it is acceptable to use the words 'the East', the 'Far East' and 'the Orient', since these terms are now so closely associated with discredited colonial ideologies and the attempt to universalise Western values. Raffles branding is dependent on the reclaiming of Orientalism as part of its charm, and it is a key feature of its brand attraction. Holt asserts that iconic brands 'work to organize collective identities, as expressions of the major social axes such as class, gender and race within a particular national discourse and beyond (Holt 2006: 357).' This is an especially apt description of the ways in which Raffles inscribes its iconic status and sustains it with reference to colonial era discourses of the West and its Romantic, Exotic Other.

The hotel underwent major restorations and refurbishments in the period 1989-1991 in response to an increasingly disappointing financial performance. It was perceived as being old-fashioned, shabby and uncomfortable (Henderson 2001: 16). The appearance of the first generation of five-star hotels on Orchard Road providing direct competition emphasised the fact that those people who came to Raffles were, according to at least one source, 'travellers in search of a past' – the Singapore of the rubber planters and Somerset Maugham (*Raffles Hotel Cookbook* 2003: 32). For these 'nostalgia seekers' the hotel's shortcomings were considered to be part of its charm (Raffles *Hotel Cookbook* 2003: 32). All the alterations that took place during this period, which included the removal and replacement of the 1920s ballroom, were done with profit maximisation in mind. There was a deliberate effort within these parameters to not compromise the traditional atmosphere of the hotel in order to keep the romance alive. Warren's reminiscences of Raffles helped turn its history into a saleable commodity. His history of Raffles, in the form of a book commissioned and published by Raffles Hotel itself, describes the colonial style of Raffles and concludes that:

> ... This quality invokes a bygone era, one far removed from the cost-efficient principles that determine the design of most hotels today, yet at Raffles it seems perfectly right and natural, even inevitable (Warren 2001: 12).

And to ensure that the renovated hotel did not disappoint those tourists looking for the romance of the East, it was refurbished with Oriental carpets, antique fittings, period furniture, old engravings and photographs to create 'the special ambience of the Raffles style' (Warren 2001: 12).

The Raffles brochure tells potential guests that: 'Few hotels can look back on more than a century of legendary service to so many distinguished guests and fewer still have preserved their past with more loving attention to detail' (*Raffles Hotel* n.d). Warren describes the hotel as 'a treasured heirloom', one of the elements of which is 'a powerful sense of history' (Warren 2001: 12). Peleggi points out that, although the 1980s refurbishment of the hotel was a matter for private enterprise, it was marketed as the recovery of a major asset of Singapore's heritage (Peleggi 1996: 444).

The Raffles website offers the chance for consumers to merge their personal history with Raffles history by 'Living the Legend in Grand Style':

> Raffles Hotel celebrates 120 years of legendary history with two exclusive accommodation packages that promise an experience of a lifetime with many fond memories to bring home ...

> Distinguished by their premier location within the Hotel, Grand
> Hotel suites are imbued with character and individuality. In-
> spired by the romance of travel in a bygone era, each is a glamor-
> ous world of gleaming brass and polished wooden floors, opulent
> drapes and oriental carpets. Elegantly appointed with handsome
> antiques and historic 19th and early 20th-century masterpieces,
> residents may luxuriate in an ambience of nostalgic charm and
> sublime personal service rare in today's world. [5]

Legendary service, legendary history, romance, nostalgic charm, these
are the tropes used consistently by Raffles on their website and in the
brochures in order to keep the romance alive. The branding of the Raf-
fles Hotel employs a discourse in the Orientalist paradigm. While it has
been renovated, it continues to draw on the tradition of Orientalist ex-
pressions of an essentialised and exoticised Orient. Nineteenth and
early twentieth-century attitudes, which transformed the Orient into an
object to be scrutinised, disciplined and governed, have been modified
in a post-colonial world, and a new Orientalism has emerged which in-
scribes the Orient as an object to be consumed (Said 1995: 41). Raffles
Beijing advertising proclaims: 'Epitomizing the beauty and refinement
of the Orient'.[6] Raffles Hotel Singapore is a microcosm of a romanti-
cised Orient, a place to consume the exotically luxurious encapsulated
in Somerset Maugham's comment that Raffles is 'the legendary symbol
for all the fables of the Exotic East.' Raffles is, following Ritzer (1999),
an enchanted space of consumption.

   Raffles has also become 'more legend than hotel' through a process
of sacralisation. In his study of the tourist, MacCannell (1999) has ar-
gued that sightseeing is a modern ritual, performed by pilgrimages to
mandatory sights. There are some things every tourist must see. Ima-
gine, for example, going to Paris without seeing the Eiffel Tower. The
element of ritual is an integral aspect of the sacralising of some sights.
Sight sacralisation begins when the sight is named and authenticated as
worthy of preservation and respect. Raffles has been anthropomor-
phised and revered in its renaissance as 'the grand Old Lady', it has
been 'immortalized by writers' and is 'loved by all' (*Raffles Hotel Cook-
book* 2003: 32). Its brochure announces: 'Majestic. Grand historic hotel.
International landmark. Glittering social venue' (*Raffles Hotel Singapore*
n.d). The large array of publicised eulogistic comments about Raffles by
the rich, the famous, the talented, the powerful and the beautiful over a
century, have ensured that it is a *named* sight, an object for sacralisa-
tion. Liu (1992, 99) cites the 1930s brochure advertising cruises on the
S.S. *Franconia*:

> While in Singapore you undoubtedly will wish to visit Raffles
> Hotel ... As you comfortably lounge on one of the verandahs try-
> ing nonchalantly to sip your first 'Million Dollar Cocktail', you
> will probably pinch yourself to see if you are awake and that it is
> you who are actually sitting at a table at Raffles, perhaps the most
> famous and widely known hostelry in the East.

And in a metonymic transformation in which Raffles takes on greater
significance than Singapore itself, Wolfgang Bauer, the Austrian play-
wright, asked: 'While at Raffles, why not visit Singapore?'[7]

Sight sacralisation also occurs when the sacred object is mechanically
reproduced (MacCannell 1999: 45). The Raffles Hotel shop sells,
amongst other consumer items, a soft toy in the shape of a Sikh door-
man, a Sikh doorman magnet, a 'heritage' magnet of the façade of the
hotel in a previous era, 'heritage' coasters and placemats with images of
the old Raffles, a miniature model of the hotel, a Raffles water globe,
passport wallets, bags, key rings, hair and beauty products, teas, honey,
chocolates, curry powder, jam and other foodstuffs bearing the Raffles
logo. Raffles has its own song known as 'I'll see you again at Raffles',
which is available on CD. Its own cocktail, the Singapore Sling, is avail-
able in bottles of premix, not to mention accoutrements such as the
Singapore Sling glass and Singapore Sling shaker. Even the advertising
for Raffles has become a saleable commodity, with postcards and repro-
ductions of early-twentieth-century for sale posters of the hotel. The
shop itself 'exudes an old world charm that is inimitably Raffles'.[8] Ser-
ious aficionados of Raffles can continue to consume it long after they
have returned home. Even people who are excluded from the 'lifestyle
experience' by their lack of financial resources can consume it in sym-
bolic form. A Sikh doorman magnet is affordable for those for whom
the Somerset Maugham Suite is not. The popularity of the souvenir –
surely a materially symbolic entity – might be understood with refer-
ence to Baudrillard's (1981) notion that people are not so much con-
suming products as signs or images.

The metonymic transfer of significance has also been seen elsewhere.
This advertisement appeared in the *Straits Times Annual* of 1955:

> Singapore would not be Singapore without Raffles Hotel. This is
> a fact well known, for Raffles is world famous and offers its
> guests so much more than other hotels ... Singapore is the focal
> point of the East and Raffles Hotel ... Singapore's international
> rendezvous of world-fame repute (cited in Liu 1992: 144).

And, in 1989, the *Melbourne Age* newspaper commented that: 'Like
Paris without the Eiffel Tower or the Vatican with no pope, Singapore

would not be the same without Raffles' (July 22, 1989, cited in Liu 1992: 190). The Tourist Board of Singapore confirmed that Raffles was sacred:

> Raffles Hotel is quite possibly more famous than Singapore itself ... It is still possible to return it to its former splendour and make it the national treasure it should be – the Crown Jewel of the visitor industry in Singapore (cited in Henderson 2001: 17).

The hotel was awarded the status of National Monument and the entire site was re-gazetted as a national monument in 1995 (Henderson 2001). Raffles Hotel is not now, and apparently never was, just a place to spend the night. It has always been a tourist sight that should not be missed on any visit to Singapore, even if you cannot afford to stay there. Raffles' role as a national icon is secured by its ability to spin a compelling myth that resonates national myths (Holt 2006: 364). MacCannell's final stage of sacralisation is *social reproduction*, that is, when other entities begin to name themselves after the famous attraction. The Fairmont Group, which also owns the Savoy in London, has named at least eight of their hotels after the Raffles in Singapore; and, of course, Raffles class on Singapore's national airline offers the ultimate in luxury air travel.

Like so many sacralised sights in Europe such as the Notre Dame, Raffles has also achieved mythological status. Liu reports that when the hotel was closed for renovations in 1989, the director of the restoration was in the hotel: 'As he walked the echoing verandas, listening for her voice and absorbing her atmosphere, he was struck by her feeling of eagerness for a face-lift, as if the dramatic turn of events was fated (Liu 1992: 150).' The renovation of the Raffles meant that '... history was given new life' (Liu 1992: 151). Jhally's study of advertising as a system of meaning defines fetishism as a way of seeing the meaning of things as an inherent part of their physical existence, when in fact that meaning is created by their integration into a *system* of meaning (Jhally 1990: 29). According to this definition, Raffles is a fetishised commodity. It was transformed into a life-enhancing material-symbolic entity and relocated into a higher ontological plane when the writer James Michener pronounced: 'To have been young and had a room at Raffles was life at its best.'[9] Raffles, it seems, is a brand, which can, as Arvidsson suggests, transform the relations of everyday life and become a context for life (Arvidsson 2006: 13).

Raffles and Exclusivity

Raffles brand strategy promoted elitism and exclusivity from the beginning. An advertisement for Raffles dating from 1904 proclaimed that it was for: 'First class visitors only … [and was] the rendezvous of the elite' (Liu 1992: 54). American travel writer and adventurer Harry Foster, who visited Singapore in the 1920s, found his entrance to the hotel blocked by a Sikh doorman. Foster says of the encounter:

> English people, girls in summery creations of silk, men in spotless white linen, grouped about wicker tables, laughing, chatting, playing cards, smoking gold tipped cigarettes, sipping whiskey-stengahs … I never felt so insignificant in my life as I did when walking up the driveway towards that veranda (cited in Liu 1992: 99).

More recent advertising continues the sense that many people who might love the romance of Raffles will be excluded. The brand's international luxury hotels are designated as 'landmarks and legends for the fortunate few (Raffles Hotel brochure n.d.)'. The Raffles Singapore website advertises:

> *Celebration Package – A Bygone Era of Charm at Raffles Hotel*
> In celebration of the prestigious Conde Nast Traveler Business Travel Awards accorded to Raffles Hotels & Resorts, ranked second amongst the Top 10 International Hotel Chains by influential readers, Raffles Hotel has launched an exclusive suite package 'A Bygone Era of Charm'.
> This exclusive suite package offers all elements that reflect the inimitable Raffles experience … an unmatched ambience of tranquillity … fine Oriental carpets … complimentary welcome Singapore Sling cocktail upon check-in …daily breakfast at Tiffin Room … choice of a leading newspaper.[10]

The brand logic fuses exclusivity and the approbation of influential readers with the romance of colonial times when people took tiffin and enjoyed the charm of the Orient. Raffles coherent, collective vision owes much to the colonial imagination and the costumed performance of some employees (I note, in particular, the continuing penchant for Sikh *jaga*-style[11] doormen in quasi-military dress uniform) in some ways, simulates colonial relationships, and affirms the desirable subject position of the consumer. The logic of the Raffles brand is the production of the Western subject in relation to the East as a location of *service*. Exclusion is predicated on the maintenance of a social order based on

forms of social differentiation. Advertising celebrates the existing social order, as Kellner predicted.

As in any expensive hotel, at the Raffles, the offer of service was, and still is, clearly based on social differentiation, a constitutive feature, according to Urry (1990) of modern tourism. The many photographs of Raffles' patrons in the first half of the twentieth century reveal a white world in which it was rare to see non-Europeans who were not employed as service staff. In a twenty-first-century global environment class and race distinctions have been decentred and their signifiers detached. The visual signs of class, such as the dinner suit, the ball gown, the upper-class manners of a Noel Coward or a Somerset Maugham, or even the fame and glamour of an Ava Gardner, are no longer necessary. It may be true that Raffles is 'loved by all' but only the affluent can afford the social experience it offers. These days, wearing jeans and a t-shirt (formerly workers' clothes), being black or Asian, or having won money in a lottery does not bar one from entry. Nostalgia doesn't come cheaply. The cheapest suite at Raffles is the Courtyard Suite at $1000 (Singapore dollars) per night. The 'Bygone Era of Charm' package (which was available at the time of writing in February 2007) was listed as $2000 Singapore dollars per room/per night (single or double occupancy, minimum two nights stay).[12] The most expensive on the tariff schedule is the Grand Hotel Suite at $6000. The tariffs for the Sarkies and the Sir Stamford Raffles suites, the most prestigious suites of all, are not listed and must be reserved privately. What some people might consider to be exorbitant prices is packaged as a desirable feature by dint of its power to exclude. Price is, of course, an important aspect of brand prestige. Premium price, as Arvidsson reminds us, represents what consumers are prepared to pay extra for the brand in relation to other brands, and is one of the main mechanisms of brand valorisation (Arvidsson 2005: 250).

If the privileges of race and class have been replaced by 'all major credit cards are accepted', then those with a substantial amount of money in their pocket, or an extensive credit limit, no longer have to *be* upper class, they can play at it. To experience the Raffles legend is to experience life as it used to be when self-definition linked to class distinction was not confounded by post-modern fragmentations of identity and social structure.

The cost of staying at Raffles means that most travellers are denied the privilege of becoming a 'guest' or lodging themselves 'in residence' and availing themselves of the experience of 'life at its best'. Raffles website cites *The Robb Report on Luxury Hotels* which deems it to be the 'Ultimate address for the luxury traveller', thereby locating it in a universalised standard of self-indulgence and gratification. The brand strategy addresses a global elite: 'Across Europe, Asia and the Caribbean,

each of its hotels is a treasured landmark in its respective destination, and provides one of the most memorable experiences elite travel offers in this world today.'[13]

The Raffles 'lifestyle experience' signifies high status and wealth to the exclusion of a large number of potential consumers of the legend and the memorable experience elite travel can offer. It is also, quite clearly, contingent upon the social differentiation between those 'in residence' and the service class which supports the lifestyle experience. For Veblen's leisure class (1970 [1925]), the avoidance of engagement in any productive occupation was an important thread in the narrative of self, and placed one in a superior social position. In a postmodern global environment, leisure is still a 'status-positioning activity' and the consumption of leisure, and the choice of leisure activities, is a signifier of a person's class, education, gender and other social variables (Rojek 2000: 3). The 'attentive, yet unobtrusive service' is not only part of the romance of Raffles, but also part of the romance of belonging, even for just one night, to the leisure class. MacConnell (1999: 11) contends that, while differentiation is the basis for a broad range of negative consequences including violence and alienation, it is also the origin of alternatives and the feeling of freedom in modern societies. Conspicuous leisure can offer this feeling of freedom, and conspicuous consumption differentiates the consumer from those who cannot afford it. It is possible to buy and retain these feelings of freedom and status, even if only temporarily. This is the promise of Raffles, and any number of other leisurely and luxurious experiences such as a cruise on the QE 2, dinner at Jamie Oliver's restaurant, or a week in Phuket.

Kellner's socially desirable subject position, and the social differentiation on which it depends, can be achieved in Raffles *Grand Indulgence Package*. The website advertises a privileged subject position in the ongoing romance of social exclusion:

> Today, residing in grand style continues at Raffles Hotel with the introduction of Grand Indulgence. Designed to be a promise of absolute luxury, the Grand Indulgence package embodies elements of absolute luxury:
> – Two-night accommodation in a Grand Hotel suite …Inspired by the romance of travel in a bygone era, each is the epitome of sophistication characterised by … opulent drapes and oriental carpets.
> – … private city tour onboard a limousine is arranged for your enjoyment …
> – Exclusively for privileged residents of Grand Indulgence package are premiums and vouchers from Escentials (*sic*) and Molton Brown, with its flagship store at Raffles Hotel Arcade.

The Grand Indulgence package also includes the following:
–   breakfast at leisure for two, either at Tiffin Room or in-suite;
–   afternoon Tea served on three-tier silver stands, for two at Bar & Billiard Room;
–   a pampering 55-minute full body massage at RafflesAmrita Spa for the couple;
–   two-way limousine transfer;
–   a memorable departure gift.[14]

The power of exclusion, and its ability to produce a desirable subject position, is also dependent on its being able to offer all of the symbols of wealth and privilege: Grand Indulgence; the romance of the bygone era; the epitome of sophistication; opulent drapes; elegance of interiors; pampering; silver stands; limousine; privileged residents; private city tour; breakfast at leisure, etc., in short, absolute luxury.

Since the consumption of travel and associated services is a social experience, it follows that an important part of the act of consumption is to consume services and commodities in the company of others. Veblen's emphasis on *conspicuous* leisure and *conspicuous* consumption acknowledges the importance of leisure activities being on display. Urry is clear that what people buy is in effect a particular social composition of other consumers, not just an individual act of consumption (Urry 1990, 25). The brand logic of Raffles, then, is to demonstrate that anyone else who might be consuming their services will belong to an appropriate social stratum. Raffles Singapore ensures the exclusion of undesirable others, and provides a social composition in which the trajectory of self can overlap the trajectory of important and acceptable others. Charlotte Cameron, an English guest at Raffles in the 1920s noted that, while visiting the East, it was even more important to identify oneself as a member of one class, and distinguish oneself from other, lesser classes:

> In the evening both men and women are more particular than we are in England to don dinner-jackets and décolleté gowns. I presume this is with the idea of setting an example to the natives and to proclaim our caste (Liu 1992: 2).

In the twenty-first century, class and status can be displayed by exercising the ability to occupy the same space as the rich, famous and glamorous. This line-up of celebrities, so often cited as distinguished guests and 'the hotel's dearest friends', is the kind of company that any traveller would be delighted to be associated with. The Raffles L'Ermitage in Beverly Hills, California, claims to be: 'Favoured by Hollywood celebrities, movie stars and luminaries' and it is located in 'the centre of it all', near all of the important attractions such as the 'major movie studios'.[15]

And to ensure that potential guests are confident that the company with whom they will be sharing the Raffles experience is appropriate, the Raffles homepage announces that Raffles is: 'Patronised by nobility, loved by all.'[16] Raffles' focus on exclusivity ensures that consumers understand that it is not mass consumption, but privileged consumption.

Raffles and Intimacy

The narrative coherence inscribed in Raffles brand logic encompasses another important node of identification for the consumer. While Raffles continually reiterates its exclusionary strategies, it also recognises those who are members of the social composition that can afford to patronise Raffles and enjoy 'the finest caravanserai East of Suez.' The coherent, collective vision offers consumers a point at which to interpolate their own narratives into the hotel's history. The hotel can become a feature in the consumer's life, forever linked to significant personal events. As a potential consumer the hotel addresses you directly and declares that if you 'celebrate your special occasions with us ... we promise memories to last a lifetime'. It gives you the opportunity to be self-aggrandising and enhance your project of the self when it invites you to: 'write your own history at this magnificent location with a Raffles Wedding Experience'.[17] In Arvidsson's account of brand management, an important ingredient for success is the building of inter-textual spaces within which consumers are provided with raw material for the exercise of their productive agency. The product or service is contextualised in a particular life situation, as Raffles rhetoric suggests, and the brand becomes an authentic meaning in the life of the consumer (Arvidsson 2005: 247).

In the case of Raffles, what gives this marketing strategy its power is that it is directly addressed to the consumer. One of the features that make this possible is the establishment of a false intimacy between consumer and seller, something that Baudrillard (2004, 15) recognised. Differentiation is both individual and personalised. The special offer for March and April 2007 at Raffles Singapore is *A luxe affair*, which offers 'sheer splendour', but only 'for the discerning and well heeled visitor in a class of their own'.[18]

Under the heading: 'Raffles Capital. Recognising Raffles Residents', the website offers membership to an exclusive club. It describes the social composition of people who would have access to 'Raffles Capital' and what privileges you may enjoy as a member. Recognition by the hotel does not only place you in a particular social milieu, but also offers a fetishised commodity:

> The world's travelling cognoscenti who choose to return to Raffles again and again are accorded the ultimate recognition – an invitation to accept membership of Raffles Capital. Just as elaborate capitals adorn many of our heritage hotels, so too does Raffles Capital membership elevate residents to the very peak of the Raffles experience; members enjoy extra recognition and exceptional privileges at Raffles hotels and resorts around the world ...[19]

In a simulated intimacy, Raffles directly addresses consumers as cognoscenti and draws them into a word only for the initiated. It is difficult not to think that Raffles is attempting to create what Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) have called a 'brand community.'[20] While the Raffles 'cognoscenti' do not manifest all of the characteristics of the brand community outlined by Muniz and O'Guinn, they certainly exhibit two of the 'core community commonalities'; one is the sharing of rituals and traditions such as the 'complimentary welcome Singapore Sling cocktail upon check-in', and high tea in the afternoon. Even the daily breakfast, which is usually a mundane aspect of a hotel stay as well as 'your choice of newspaper' have both been ritualised by the hotel. The other is the 'consciousness of kind' or a shared 'knowing of belonging' (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001). As cognoscenti, Raffles' guests *know* how to consume because they are members of a community of consumption, members of Raffles Capital. They are an imagined community (Anderson 1991) of like minds, tastes and incomes, sharing brand experience.

It should also be noted that Raffles branding is designed to discourage the idea that people who stay there are just tourists. Anyone staying at Raffles is said to be 'in residence'. Paying customers are 'guests' and are made to feel as if they are participants in and contributors to the on-going myths, the writers of the legend, the characters in the romance. One stays in the Somerset Maugham Suite so that one can *be* Somerset Maugham for a night. 'Guests', especially rich and famous ones, have become so instrumental in the creation of the romance that they have transcended the category of 'guest' to become a 'friend':

> Over the years, Raffles Hotel has been privileged to host some of the world's brightest luminaries from the entertainment, literary and political arenas.
> The twelve Personality Suites (Joseph Conrad Suite, Rudyard Kipling Suite, Somerset Maugham Suite, Noel Coward Suite, Charlie Chaplin Suite, John Thomson Suite, Ava Gardner Suite, André Malraux Suite, Pablo Neruda Suite, James Michener Suite, Gavin Young Suite and John Wayne Suite) are posthumous tributes to some of the hotel's dearest friends and are distinguished

by the specially sourced celebrity memorabilia placed within each
suite. All suites feature private parlours and dining areas.[21]

Raffles is a series of linked physical spaces, which seem to fit Arvids-
son's description of a 'themed commercial environment' (Arvidsson
2006: 79). It has a museum, a theatre, a florist, a food store, an exten-
sive shopping arcade, 18 restaurants and bars, a pool, seven utility
rooms, a gymnasium, an executive centre and a 'culinary academy'.
Each 'personality suite' is a miniature theme park, complete with mock
period furniture and fittings, and memorabilia of a famous person who
once stayed there. Ritzer has pointed out that the distinction between
mall and amusement park has been almost obliterated (Ritzer 1999:
135). It seems that the line between a night's accommodation and a
themed experience is also blurred at Raffles.
   The Raffles coherent vision involves selling the romance of the Raf-
fles, and the intimate relationship customers are encouraged to imagine
themselves having with the hotel, as much as the contemporary reality
of a globally acknowledged standard of excellence and luxury:

> *Raffles The Plaza, Singapore – A Night to Remember*
> The moment you arrive, a knowing smile darts across your face.
> With plenty of space to unwind and indulge, it's little wonder the
> Penthouse Suites at Raffles The Plaza were voted amongst the
> most decadent in the world.
> The suites are a sensory pleasure, where panoramic views of the
> Singapore skyline compete with the unadulterated luxury inside.
> Here, you escape into an unhurried world of blissful luxury, and
> you give yourself up to being completely spoiled. After a slow
> sauna in a bathroom larger than the average hotel room, you
> dress for your private dinner party. On the patio, your personal
> valet prepares a gourmet barbecue for two, as you sip chilled
> champagne to the gentle sounds of trickling water. The night is
> now unforgettably yours.[22]

One knows what to expect from the Raffles Oriental experience. It is,
after all, inscribed in legend and one can also create oneself as the privi-
leged subject of the social relations on which the experience depends.
As one of the privileged few who share the knowledge, guests are 'pam-
pered in an atmosphere of intimacy and privacy' surrounded by old-
world opulence and displays of decadence. The delicate frisson of sexu-
ality introduced by the sensory pleasure, the slow sauna leading to the
private dinner party for two and the unforgettable night may not have
escaped the reader's attention. An important aspect of a brand's success
is encapsulated in this vignette. Lury (2004: 6) tells us that the brand

operates as a platform for practice. Arvidsson (2006: 8) addresses this point, explaining that an iconic brand name anticipates future experiences and offers a field of possible responses by providing the *context of consumption* (Arvidsson 2005: 244; author's emphasis). This might account for the knowing smile on the face of the consumer. Furthermore, the brand suggests ways in which a product or service can be experienced, related or felt. Everybody knows they are expected to enjoy the indulgences described above. Who could resist the opportunity to take possession of the night via the chilled champagne and other sensory experiences?

The theme of intimacy is continued in the focus on the consumer's body encapsulated in the invitation to the Amrita Spa, a feature of every Raffles hotel. The advertising taps directly into the project of the self, and into Raffles' promise to recognise the cognoscenti, the people with the knowing smiles darting across their faces. In this discourse, the cognoscenti become enlightened souls in search of eternal youth:

> *Raffles Amrita Spa*
> Inspired by Amrita. For centuries, enlightened souls on journeys of self-discovery have celebrated this mystic nectar of the gods, the elixir of eternal youth. This legendary assurance of renewal is a commitment to every guest of RafflesAmrita Spa.
> Get Pampered...
> RafflesAmrita Spa at Raffles Hotel offers relaxing and pampering wellness therapy in the privacy and luxury of a grand hotel.
> Exclusively for residents only, this full-service spa features a gymnasium, hot and cold dip pools, body care, exclusive therapy rooms and unique couple rooms, designed for a relaxing and soothing massage, facial, or any of our therapeutic services with your partner. Fragrant aromatherapy burners, candles, soft lighting and signature RafflesAmrita Spa cuisine, backed by the legendary Raffles service, create a simple philosophy of complete wellness.[23]

Therapeutic services with your partner? Unique rooms for couples? Along with the 'legendary assurance of renewal' and the 'simple philosophy of complete wellness', there is the suggestion, albeit oblique, of an erotic experience. To enhance its legitimacy, it also mobilises the mythology of ancient India,[24] with a gesture in the direction of ayurvedic medicine.

The Raffles Hotel le Royale, Phnom Penh, a Hotel with those rare attributes-history and civilised style, offers no less than 41 separate services for the body including massages, facials, aromatherapy and 'the botanical experience', not counting the seven different types of waxing

services.[25] Its rhetoric of personal care plunders a variety of traditions of body maintenance to offer the consumers their choice of tradition: a traditional Khmer massage which 'works on the pressure points of the Oriental Meridian'; Swedish massage, involving the 'five classical massage movements of European origin' and Thai massage which mobilises 'Zen energy lines'.[26] Exclusivity, legend and the hotel's concern for the consumer's intimate experiences pervade the discourse of technologies of the self and reinforce the privileged subject position of the consumer. The promotion of hedonism and the creation of desire is a prime agenda for advertising.

Conclusion

While the discursive construction of Raffles hotels in each of their locations is adapted to local conditions and historical circumstances, all the hotels in the Raffles chain deploy similar signifiers and create meaning with similar imagery. All branches reproduce a political economy of an aristocratic past characterised by a leisured and sumptuous lifestyle for those who deserve it, supported by a service industry. All reprise the romance of an essentialised and orientalised Belle Époque of social exclusion, while subscribing to the myth that anyone can be '[transported] into the opulence and splendour of days gone by...' There is a global pattern of inducements: the celebrated Oriental service, refinement, cuisine, décor, architecture, ambience, splendour, elegance and luxury. Featherstone's comment that advertising provides a poetics of everyday life (Featherstone 1992: 174) is particularly relevant to an understanding of Raffles' promotional strategies. The consumption of luxury apparently has a universal meaning. Brand Raffles pre-structures the consumer's experience in an enchanted environment that any global traveller knows how to respond to (Lury 1999). Raffles has been promoting a luxurious context for consumption for more than a century, so it by no means fits Ritzer's description of a new means of consumption. It has, however, some similarities to Ritzer's 'cathedrals of consumption'. The 'sacred, even religious character' of the shopping mall cathedrals has its parallel in the quasi-religious overtones of the Raffles Pilgrimage to Self ('enlightened souls on journeys of self-discovery') (Ritzer 1999: 8). Raffles is, if you will, not so much a cathedral of consumption, as a High Church of Indulgence.

A stay at Raffles is a 'commodified experience' (Giddens 1991, 196). Individual self-expression, manifested in 'lifestyle', requires visible signs of consumption, which outweigh the use value. Giddens (1991: 200) also makes the point that commodification promotes appearance as the prime arbiter of taste, and sees self-development above all in

terms of display. The coherence of the Raffles brand and its provision of a collective vision are primarily articulated through this lifestyle experience. A pre-determined frame of action accompanies the lifestyle experience, embedded in the brand (Arvidsson 2006: 8).

But, Raffles promises more than just a lifestyle. Its symbolic value lies in its power to exclude others, and to locate the consumer in a desirable social composition. It offers both the pleasures of the intimate and the glamour of the public display of wealth and status. It has the effect of linking the particular (the knowing individual, the privileged guest) with the universal (a global elite). Like a true cultural icon it has articulated itself through a discourse beyond itself and inserted itself into the myths of nationhood (Holt 2006: 355).

The Raffles experience is not just a night in a hotel. Its symbolic value comes from its association with social and personal meanings. This has been made possible by what Williams has identified as a form of magic, or a highly organised and professional system of magical inducements and satisfactions (Williams 1980: 185). It is a material symbolic entity embedded in a larger system of meaning. The true magic of the Raffles romance is that it provides models of identity, offers a desirable subject position and celebrates the colonial and postcolonial social order.

Notes

1   http://siemreap.raffles.com (accessed 27 March 2007).
2   http://beijing.raffles.com (accessed 27 March 2007).
3   The founders, four Armenian brothers named Sarkies – Martin, Tigran, Aviet and Arshak – came from Isfahan, Iran. The family also established the Eastern and Oriental Hotel in Penang, the Strand Hotel in Rangoon and the Hotel Majapahit in Surabaya (now called the Mandarin Oriental Hotel Majapahit). As some of the most successful hoteliers in Asia, they dominated the hospitality trade in the British Straits Settlements (Singapore, Penang and Melaka) for nearly 50 years (Wright, 2003).
4   This is a statement frequently reiterated in Raffles advertising. What he actually said was: 'Feed at Raffles and sleep at the Hotel de L'Europe' (Liu 1992: 29).
5   http://singapore-raffles.raffles.com/offers/anniversary_suite_packages.html (accessed 29 April 2007).
6   http://beijing.raffles.com/z891/index.shtml (accessed 29 April 2007).
7   http://singapore-raffles.raffles.com/ex_offers/offers07.html (accessed 17 February 2007).
8   http://www.raffleshotelgifts.com/ (accessed 17 April 2007).
9   http://singapore-raffles.raffles.com/z912/accommodation.html (accessed 17 February 2007).
10 http://singapore-raffles.raffles.com/offers/RHCelebration_Package (accessed 11February 07).
11 Jaga: watchman, guard (Malay).
12 http://singapore-raffles.raffles.com/offers/RHCelebration_Package (accessed 11 February 2007).

13 http://www.raffles.com (accessed 27 March 2007).
14 http://singapore-raffles.raffles.com/ex_offers/offers07.html (accessed 17 February 2007).
15 http://beverlyhills.raffles.com (accessed 1 April 2007).
16 http://singapore-raffles.raffles.com/ (accessed 1 April 2007).

14 The Role of Recruitment Agencies for Japanese Working Women in Singapore

Yoshimichi Yui

Introduction

Economic globalisation has increased the mobility of the international workforce. Transnational flows include the following socio-economic groups: the transnational business class comprised of highly mobile, highly skilled professional, managerial and entrepreneurial elites, a large group of low-waged immigrants filling unskilled and semi-skilled niches in the urban service economy, expressive specialists who enliven the cultural and artistic scene and world tourists attracted by the cosmopolitan ambience (Yoe 2001). Moreover, it has been argued that the most powerful manifestations of the internationalisation of the capital in the world real estate economy are global cities, distinguished by their high concentration of corporate headquarters, advanced telecommunications and research and development infrastructures, as well as the presence of international financial services, and disproportionately large clusters of high-waged professional and managerial expatriate workers (Beaverstock 1996). Skilled international migration is a fundamental globalisation process in the 'flows of space' of societies that are externally networked. These include not only the skilled professional and managerial elite, but also, interestingly enough, their assistants and support personnel. Globalisation, therefore, induces large volume international migration of both skilled professional workers and support-service personnel who routinely occupy subordinate positions or positions that are based on locally hired remunerative packages.

The labour practices of large accountancy firms are a case in point. These international firms have restructured their demand for professional labour on a global scale. Accounting staff members are subcontracted to their respective firm's network of various international offices or attached to the firm's multinational clients through secondment, transfers, or personnel exchange procedures (Beaverstock 1996). Beaverstock and Boardwell (2000) have reviewed the linkage between globalisation and migration in light of skilled international migration. They have analysed the transnational elite who are highly educated, highly skilled, highly paid, highly mobile, and who are 'trans-local' corporate

actors/agents of global capitalism, in an attempt to understand the role of expatriates as a transnational elite in the global city context. This labour mobility has resulted in the heightened importance of overseas job searches in this trans-national mobility process. Consequently, elite labour market intermediaries – headhunters from human resource consultancy firms – have emerged as important players who generate and operate within the more subtle and at times not immediately perceivable sphere of knowledge capitalism (Faulconbridge, Hall and Beaverstock 2008).

Globalisation has given rise to the movement of skilled professionals not only to the economic centres and cities of developed countries, but also, increasingly, to the growing cities of countries whose economies are growing at a healthy or robust rate. Singapore, with its rapid and consistent economic growth, has become the key business centre of Southeast Asia. As a regional hub of East Asia, short-term business travel to Jakarta, Hong Kong and other regional international financial and business centres has become an important facet of career development and local knowledge accumulation of professionals based in Singapore (Beaverstock: 2002). Staff members are posted abroad to the overseas branches of their firms in order to fulfil business strategy; develop transnational human resource skills, and to train the local staff of overseas branches.

However, when it comes to the practicalities of everyday private life, the expatriate home life, as well as the social contexts within which expatriates interact with others, local Singaporeans appear to be excluded from these activities. Expatriates are therefore dis-embedded from the locals within the context of Singapore the global city.

As early as the 1970s, over 200 Japanese companies moved their production offshore to Southeast Asia. Closer to the present, there are over 3000 Japanese companies represented in Singapore, resulting in the movement of many Japanese expatriates to the city-state. Singapore is an especially interesting location for expatriates, as the Japanese constitute one of the largest expatriate communities in the country, numbering about 20,000. Japanese expatriates have gained prominence in Singapore over the last three decades with the expansion of Japanese direct foreign investment in manufacturing industries in Singapore in the 1980s and 1990s (Thang et al. 2002). The number of workers in the service sectors and customer service has increased and become diversified in order to support the growing number of Japanese expatriates. Japanese companies have also led in their demand for more bilingual staff who speak both Japanese and English. Japanese women normally fill these support positions. Consequently, globalisation has affected Japanese working women as well. Thang et al. (2002, 2004, 2006) have analysed the work and experiences of Japanese women in Singapore,

and they have confirmed that Singapore and Hong Kong have emerged as two of the top destinations for Japanese women seeking employment overseas. Human resource recruitment agencies in Japan have recorded huge upsurges in the number of women applying for jobs at these two locations, and by 1994, at least one major recruitment firm had established a profitable business in career seminars catering to women looking for job opportunities in the northeast and Southeast Asia (Thang et al. 2006).

Recruitment agencies play a major role in facilitating emigration. According to Thang et al. (2004), one of the more popular agencies had more than 14,000 Japanese registrants as of early 2002, of which 60 percent were female. The single women in the study conducted by Thang et al. were representative of Japanese single women working overseas. Most had obtained their jobs either through classified advertisements, recruitment agencies specialising in placements for Japanese, or personal recommendations from friends already working in Singapore. Some had signed up with recruitment agencies in Singapore and attended job interviews while vacationing, but the overwhelming majority had been hired in Japan. In Singapore, they would hold full-time positions, usually as secretaries or in administrative occupations, as well as sales, marketing, and teaching positions. These jobs usually required a proficiency in the Japanese language (Thang and MacLachlan 2002).

In this chapter, we will discuss the role of agencies recruiting Japanese women to work in Singapore. Most Japanese men are expatriates sent by their company. By contrast, most Japanese women gain employment in foreign countries through local hiring efforts in Japan, and upon their own initiative. This chapter, which stems from a larger project that investigates the background and activities of Japanese women abroad, is concerned with the information on jobs provided by recruitment agencies, as well as the activities conducted by the agencies in their attempt to ride the crest of the wave of globalisation.

The data upon which the present paper bases its discussion may be found in job information magazines, and job-search websites that specialise in positions abroad for young Japanese.

The Background to Japanese Going Abroad to Work

Japan's own employment situation has been deteriorating since 1990. Japan's Employment system has been drastically and systematically changed to mirror the practices of American companies. Most remarkable amongst these changes is the creation of a flexible labour market and working conditions. Many Japanese companies have phased out the

lifetime employment guarantee and have eradicated the seniority sys-
tem. At the same time, the non-permanent employee has replaced the
regular employees, which include part-timers, dispatched employees
from human resource companies and temporary staff. At present, non-
permanent employees constitute over 30 percent of the entire Japanese
workforce.

This phenomenon has obvious and serious effects on the prospects
of young people and women in Japan. The young, as well as women,
form the bulk of non-permanent employees. They are employed in 'fra-
gile' positions, and their unstable and unpredictable state of employ-
ment and career prospects in Japan are a cause for anxiety. This has
been recognised as a significant social problem, to the extent that the
word '*freeter*' as a Japanese-English term has come to denote the free-
lance part-time worker, while the term '*NEET*' refers to young people
not in education, employment or training. Furthermore, this social de-
velopment has an impact on those Japanese entering into marriage at a
late age, and on the low fertility levels in Japan, as many young people
who face unstable employment conditions avoid or delay marriage and
childbearing.

The second remarkable change in the Japanese labour market is the
rapid feminisation of the work force. Since the 1970s, the number of
women who are in active employment, both in proportion to the num-
ber of men working as well as in real numerical terms, has been on the
increase. However, in terms of the social advancement of women and
equality of pay, Japan is not listed amongst the top 100 in the world.
The number of professional or skilled women is indeed increasing in
Japan. However, it is also apparent that the numbers of female part-
timers and dispatched workers are also increasing. Women tend to suc-
cumb to these forms of employment because they are often considered
by firms to serve a mitigating function within the labour market. The
result is that the economic disparity between elite professional females
and most other female workers is, in general, increasing in Japan. Many
unskilled women have to put up with unstable and low-paid works.
Furthermore, women are easily cut off during an economic recession.

In recent years, a significant number of young people have begun to
seek employment through job-information magazines and websites. I
have found a number of job information magazines specialising in
overseas employment. A number of job information websites specialis-
ing in jobs abroad have also been found. It has to be recognised that it
is becoming more commonplace to choose a foreign country as a place
of employment out of one's own free will. Such an international demo-
graphic movement has, however, not been sufficiently examined.

It has been assumed that the boom in the number of Japanese work-
ing overseas was launched in 1994-95. The boom is believed to have gi-

ven rise to discussions concerning Japanese people working in Hong Kong, which resulted in a lot of media attention. At that time, the difficulty in finding employment in Japan was due to the country's serious economic recession. The reasons for the boom in Japanese employees working in Hong Kong was due to the relative ease with which one could get a work visa under United Kingdom laws, and also because of the attractiveness of Hong Kong as an-English speaking location.

Working overseas is subjected to the primary constraint of securing a work visa. This can be difficult to obtain in Western countries, where a working visa can be issued only to workers with special skills or expertise. Conversely, in Singapore, graduates from 4-year college programs can secure a work visa with relative ease, which makes it easier for Japanese employees to obtain employment in the city-state. That has been due to Singapore's government's search for non-blue-collar foreign workers for the purpose of developing the city-state's objective of becoming a global economical hub. In addition, Singapore, like Hong Kong, is English speaking.

Furthermore, many Japanese-owned companies abroad have been attempting to cut their operating costs by reducing the number of expatriates they send abroad, and instead, switching to local employees or locally-hired Japanese employees. In Singapore, Japanese expatriates tend to live with their family, as most Japanese feel comfortable and safe in the city-state, factors that are of primary importance to the Japanese. Security and safety are particularly important considerations for Japanese women.

When I conducted an interview survey of Japanese women employed in Singapore, I discovered that most of the respondents were using job information gathered from recruitment agency websites. The survey of recruitment agencies reveals that over 80% of Japanese applicants are young women, and many engage the agencies' services in their search for employment. Therefore, we think the role of recruitment agencies is important for applicants who hope to work abroad. This study is intended to investigate the role of recruitment agencies in employment abroad, while the survey clarifies the role of recruitment agencies for applicants of work abroad.

The Activities of Recruitment Agencies

The recent growth of labour-related producer services is remarkable. Before taking up the main subject, recruitment agencies should be briefly explained. Recruitment businesses are divided into two categories in Japan: temporary staff employment agencies, regulated by the Law for Worker Dispatching Undertakings; and recruitment agencies, as fee-

charging employment placement bodies matching businesses that seek workers and workers seeking employment, which are regulated by the Employment Security Law.

Recruitment agencies are called 'personnel introduction businesses' for employers, and are considered 'job placement businesses' for applicants, since jobs are being introduced.

While the operation licensing of both temporary staff employment agencies and recruitment agencies differs, both types of agencies tend to operate jointly due to recent deregulations in the Japanese labour market. When looking at the business performance of recruitment agencies dealing with both temporary staffing and recruiting, most of their revenues came from temporary staffing. Moreover, headhunting, which introduces a talented candidate to a managerial position, brings in as much in referral fees as the person's annual income. The higher a client's job level is, the higher the ratio that an agency charges in referral fees.

The services provided by recruitment agencies are as follows:

1. Sales: This pertains to the collecting of information on vacancies from client companies. Most agencies assign male representatives to provide this service. Information on vacancies is often requested directly from a client.
2. Consultation: This pertains to the matching of job offers and job seekers. This service tends to have more female representatives, apparently due to the need for delicate communications skills and a friendly attitude. Thus, there are quite a high percentage of women in recruitment agencies in this role.
3. Staff education/training: Many Japanese companies have their own training programs. However, a number of companies depend on employment agencies to acquire data on local business practices and business cultures.
4. Other services: These include translation services. In Singapore, many job offers involve translation services. Many Japanese companies usually utilise bilingual Japanese residents in Singapore.

Business condition Changes in Recruitment Agencies

As a complement to the national Public Employment Security Offices (job placement offices) in Japan, recruiting by private agencies had been limited to 29 job descriptions, including nurses. However, the labour market was liberalised in 1999. With this deregulation, Japanese firms changed their employment systems from regular to temporary, part-time or dispatch jobs. Moreover, in recent years, the recruiting of white-collar workers by employment agencies, involved in clerical work or en-

gineering has been increasing. Furthermore, the recruiting business has diversified into areas such as mid-career recruitment and job changes, headhunting, as well as reemployment support for middle-aged workers or older. These changes in the Japanese labour market destroyed the former employment practices and caused unstable employment conditions. We can say that the growth of the human resource business is the result of the liberalisation of the labour market, a situation that has been influenced by economic globalisation.

As a result of the deregulation of the Japanese labour market, it has become increasingly unstable and mobile. This instability has led to an increase in the demand for job information, because workers want stable companies and higher income jobs. Consequently, both job seekers and employees depend on recruitment agencies, as recruitment agencies have a wealth of job information and job seeker data. The result is that the human resource sector has grown rapidly.

The main reason that recruitment agencies can garner such large amounts of information is because of how they acquire their data – by collecting job information from both companies and job seekers via their registration on various agency websites. Internet recruiting has been used to target relatively skilled workers, primarily managers, professionals, and other highly skilled workers. Even so, referral-based recruiting has remained the preferred hiring strategy because of its relatively low cost, speed and reliability (Niles and Hanson: 2003). Despite the growing importance of Internet-based recruiting for Japanese companies, these companies use this medium minimally and mostly to recruit for relatively high-level positions. These positions usually have to be advertised region-wide because they are harder to fill locally (Niles and Hanson 2003). Japanese Internet recruiting is developing a growing presence overseas.

Recruitment agencies in Japan may roughly be grouped into two: One group comprises of affiliated foreign companies. These include Adecco and Manpower, of which the former is one of the most well-known global human resource consulting companies and is based in Switzerland. The other group comprises independent agencies such as Recruit Ablic, Temptaff, Pasona, JAC, Staff Service and Intelligence.

Some employment agencies specialise in temporary staff and were established to meet their parent company's human resource demands. Some manufacturers secure their staff through subsidiary temporary staff employment agencies, set up to pare off personnel costs. Such trends have been seen in all industrial fields. As an example, a number of universities have experienced a sudden surge in the number of non-regular clerical staff, employed by university-established temporary staff agencies.

Website for recruitment agencies

Niles and Hanson (2003) point out that employers use the Internet stra-
tegically to enhance the volume of applications when the labour market
is tight and to segment the applicant pool when the market becomes
looser and the number of resumes becomes overwhelming. The Inter-
net is one such potentially revolutionary information technology, offer-
ing the possibility for the increased access to information by greatly re-
ducing the time and costs of transferring it over distance and the costs
of sending information to many places simultaneously. Online job post-
ings expand the occupational opportunities and geographic scale of the
labour market for job seekers. Advertising jobs on the Internet can be a
strategy for extending job opportunities to all qualified workers and to
expand the social and geographic diversity of an employer's applicant
pool. Furthermore, Niles and Hanson (2003) note that online job post-
ings transcend the constraints of grounded social relations, for both em-
ployees and employers, by giving people direct access to job informa-
tion that would not otherwise be available. The Internet has the poten-
tial to provide job seekers with information that may improve their
livelihoods by being able to access better jobs and providing employers
with information about better-qualified workers.

   Table 15.1 shows the list of recruitment agencies listed on the 'Singa-
pore oyakudachi jouhou' Website, which means 'Useful Singapore web
for Japanese' http://www.singaweb.net/. This website is popular
amongst the Japanese community in Singapore, and many Japanese re-
sidents and visitors use the Website's resources. The site's main busi-
ness content is comprised of recruiting and advertisement of Japanese
and Japanese speakers. The recruitment business conducted pertains
primarily to temporary staffing. In spite of the presence of a lot of re-
cruitment agencies in Singapore, there are few domestic or foreign
agencies active on this site.

   On the 'Useful Singapore Web', ten companies have postings on the
'recruiting' page. Among these, five companies are Japanese, two are lo-
cal Singapore recruitment agencies (one of these had a recruitment ser-
vice that specialised in Japanese and South Korean candidates), two for-
eign-affiliated companies, and one of Malaysian origin. A major for-
eign-affiliated recruitment agency – Adecco Personnel PTE Ltd. – has 15
branch offices in Singapore, one of which specialises in recruiting Japa-
nese personnel. Two other agencies – J-Power Consultancy and Y.N. Ca-
reer Consultants PTE Ltd. – are independent of any major Japanese re-
cruitment agencies. According to the founders of these two companies,
a recruitment agency can easily become independent if it possesses the
right information and recruitment know-how.

Table 14.1 *Recruitment Agencies in Singapore Offering Services to Japanese Companies and Japanese Workers*

Company name	Capital base	Business Services
PASONA SINGAPORE PTE LTD	Japanese (DM: Singaporean)	Recruiting Japanese and local hires
PEOPLESEARCH PTE LTD	Singapore (Biggest Singaporean HR net group)	Recruiting Japanese and Koreans, Japanese speakers and Korean speakers, human resource scouting
JAC SINGAPORE PTE LTD	Japanese	Recruiting and manpower dispatching of Japanese and local staff, human resource consulting translation, interpretation research, convention service, visa application process
TEMPSTAFF(S) PTE LTD	Japanese	Recruiting and manpower dispatching for Japanese and foreign companies Human resource management service
KELLY SERVICE	Singapore	Recruiting and manpower dispatching
STAFF SERVICE (SINGAPORE) PTE LTD	Japanese	Recruiting and manpower dispatching
Y N CAREER CONSULTANTS PTE LTD	Japanese (self-funding)	Recruiting and manpower dispatching human affairs outsource translation/ interpretation education training
ADECO PERSONNEL PTE LTD	Foreign, Multinational	At the Japanese branch, recruiting and manpower dispatching Japanese and Japanese speakers
J POWER CONSULTANCY	Japanese (self-funding)	Recruiting and manpower dispatching for Japanese, in-service training for local staff (business manner on-the-job training, telephone skills training, translation/interpretation business consulting (integrated human resource producing)
EXECUTIVE WORK PLACE (S) PTE LTD	Japanese (self-funding)	Recruiting and manpower dispatching human affairs outsourcing
HRNET ONE OTE LTD	Japanese (self-funding)	Executive search (mainly for administrative positions)
MERCER HUMAN RESOURCES CONSULTANTING	Japanese (self-funding)	Recruiting and manpower dispatching human resource outsourcing
RECRUIT ABLIC INC	Japanese	Recruiting and manpower dispatching human affairs outsourcing.
N-QUEST PTE LTD	Malaysian	Recruiting, representative services translation/interpretation account representative services.

Source: http://www.singaweb.net/

The agencies on the website maintained minimum registration requirements in Singapore: a college degree, over 5 years working experience, OA skills, and English proficiency with TOEIC scores between 650-700. These requirements are the defined standards set by the Singapore government. It is easier to obtain a work visa in Singapore than in other countries such as the US, UK or Australia, which are also attractive to the Japanese. The Singapore government adopts an immigration policy that is conducive to the absorption of skilled, high-educated and professional workers and managers in order to build up a highly skilled and globalised workforce.

Many Japanese or major foreign recruitment agencies have their subsidiaries in Singapore. The network of recruitment agencies is linked to the areas of activity of Japanese companies via their respective websites. Japanese recruitment agencies for Japanese personnel have discriminatory networks. For example, 'Pasona Singapore' has offices in Japan, Singapore, Hong Kong, Thailand, China, Taiwan, US, Canada and UK. Two other recruitment agencies – JAC and 'Tempstaff' – have similar networks. Japanese recruitment agencies have networks in Southeast Asia and China, two economic regions where Japanese companies are highly active. The result is a close relationship between Japanese recruitment agencies and companies. Similar networks have also been established by the foreign-affiliated agencies of these recruitment agencies. These affiliated agencies have branches in America and Europe. These networks leverage the human resource demands of Japanese companies operating in foreign economic regions and are exclusive to Japanese recruitment agencies. Foreign agencies, including Singapore's domestic agencies and other non-Japanese agencies, do not have similar recruitment networks in Japan.

'Space ALC' (http://home.alc.co.jp/db/owa/cr_agency2_src) of the ALC Press in Japan, posts the most substantial information on overseas employment. The website includes nine recruitment agencies for Japanese job seekers in Singapore. Most of them were Japanese recruitment agencies. Japanese job seekers tend to use the websites of well-known agencies because the reliability of recruitment agencies is important to them. Reliability is especially important when foreign jobs are sought.

Most of these recruitment agencies have introduced more than half of their clients to Japanese companies. The smaller the scale of operations of an agency, the higher the rate is of introductions to Japanese companies. That is because the agencies' profits depend on payments for the procurement of high-wageworkers. The procurement of high-wage Japanese personnel is more profitable than the successful placement of local, or Singaporean, employees.

Moreover, on 'HELLO SINGAPORE 2005', the version of the Yellow Pages used by many Japanese living in Singapore, an additional seven

agencies, other than the ones mentioned thus far, are listed. These include Recruit Ablic, and two independent recruitment agencies. These recruitment agencies also seek Japanese and Japanese-speaking Singaporeans through various advertisements.

Activity areas of recruitment agencies

'*Useful Singapore Web*' (http://www.singaweb.net/), an online recruitment site used by many Japanese in Singapore, shows that major recruitment agencies targeting mainly the Japanese have been cooperating and placing jobs throughout Asia through their branch networks. The two independent recruitment agencies were recruiting on behalf of Japanese companies in Southeast Asia, although their base of operation was limited to Singapore.

Although most of the businesses were deployed in Southeast Asia and China, recruiting in the US and the UK was partly connected by networks. However, recruiting in these developed nations was, in many cases, limited to engineering or managerial positions, and clerical positions, due to work visa requirements. Although many female Japanese job seekers want to work abroad in order to use and improve their English skills, there are few countries which permit them to be issued with work visas. Recruitment agencies have in turn turned this restriction to their own advantage because they recommend female Japanese applicants for positions in Singapore, where the language is English.

Furthermore, recruitment agencies are aware that female Japanese job seekers are often compelled to leave Japan because of their disillusionment with the Japanese workplace, as well as their willingness to experience independent living overseas. Economic gain is not necessarily the primary motivating factor for seeking employment abroad. Consequently, many have been willing to take jobs at local wages, without the luxury of housing and transportation allowances, and often live modestly while abroad. They often earn lower incomes than they would in Japan (Thang et al. 2004).

The employment information on the website of each recruitment agency shows that there is a variety of industries and job descriptions in Singapore for the female Japanese job seeker. Manufacturing, finance and trade are typical job sectors found on the agencies' websites. Moreover, the demand for sales, marketing and customer service positions is increasing. The information on each agency's website is similar, because most companies post their human resource requests with more than one agency, a tactic that allows client companies to increase their chances of fulfilling their human resource demands.

Employment Information of Recruitment Agency

Employment information from the registration page of a major Japanese recruitment agency website in Singapore is summarised in table 15.1. This agency reveals almost all of its employment information to the public and recruits via the Internet. A number of agencies, however, do not make any of this type of employment information available to the public. It is apparent that there are many job offers in the IT-related, electronic manufacturing, and financial industries.

Japanese recruitment agencies in Singapore were mainly recruiting locally hired Japanese employees on behalf of Japanese-owned firms as well as foreign affiliates in Singapore and neighbouring countries; and locally hired Japanese-speaking local employees (e.g., Japanese-speaking Singaporeans and Chinese-Malaysians) on behalf of Japanese-owned firms.

Most of the Japanese recruitment agencies in Singapore do not reveal the details of their business dealings to the public and refused to respond to my interview. This is probably because information itself is the key to business success in the recruitment industry. However, one Japanese company did offer some information on their recruitment activities in Singapore. This company generated some 30% of its revenues by recruiting Singaporeans for locally based positions, for which fluency in the Japanese language was not necessary.

Recruiting Japanese workers is profitable because referral fees for Japanese applicants are higher than those for locals. Although this section accounted for 57.8% of all of the successful placements, lower referral fees have made sales figures in this section of the agency's business similar to the placement of Japanese workers. The latter accounted for only 22.8% of the total number of successful placements, and 32.8% of total turnover. Referral fees are calculated at a percentage of the annual income, and thus the approximately 10% higher referral fees for the successful referral of Japanese workers suggests that Japanese salaries are generally higher than those of Singaporeans.

Why is the role of recruitment agencies important for Japanese businesses and applicants in Singapore? Japanese companies operating in Singapore continue to use the Japanese language in their business activities with other Japanese companies, which are often their key clients. The Japanese business sector needs Japanese women to fill their lower-end secretarial, clerical, reception and office worker positions. Japanese companies need Japanese women who are able to provide administrative support for the Japanese business culture. At the same time, Japanese companies prefer temporary and flexible workers based in Singapore to expatriates from Japan. Many Japanese companies thus depend on recruitment agencies for the recruitment and job training of their applicants in order to cut operating costs.

Japanese companies offer most of the employment. Because sales and marketing employees are required to be on the road for up to one-third of every year, it has been necessary for the post to be filled in and the work to be done while the marketing staff are away on business trips. And because Japanese company headquarters in Tokyo are unable to communicate with their branches abroad in English, there remains a demand for Japanese-speaking personnel in Singapore.

Many of the business transactions are between Japanese companies themselves, thus it is important to win contracts by entertaining Japanese clients. Some Japanese companies use female employees as business escorts. Thus it remains important for these business escorts to speak Japanese and be familiar with Japanese business cultural practices. However, few Japanese females are employed in technical positions. In that sense, Japanese women are marginal as already noted by Thang et al. (2002).

More recently, there have been more job offers in the financial sector. Faced with a shortage of competent candidates, companies in this sector have sought competent, experienced applicants from Japan. Female employees must be able to serve tea and have a polite disposition towards customers. To some extent, these attributes have been regarded as more important than the applicants' academic backgrounds, because the Japanese companies' clients are other Japanese enterprises. Companies in the financial sector, in particular, demand perfect Japanese language skills.

Most of the female Japanese workers in Singapore enjoy their leisure time. However, they are generally disappointed with their working conditions. They want to use their English and sharpen their English skills. However, there are few companies that offer the opportunity to use English.

The phenomenon of increasing numbers of female Japanese working abroad is one of the effects of an increasingly globalised world economy, an economy that needs increasing numbers of workers at affordable local wages rather than at the costlier home rates. However, existing economic theories regarding labour supply and demand in a given economic context cannot satisfactorily explain this labour phenomenon. This phenomenon described here is not beholden to the traditional arguments about a wage gap between countries that dispatch migrant workers abroad (where wages are generally low) and countries that need migrant workers (where wages are generally high). Instead, female Japanese workers experience a decline in their incomes when they arrive in Singapore.

It is important to remember that female Japanese workers decide to work abroad because of the opportunity to experience a different lifestyle from that in Japan. In other words, it is possible to argue that many fe-

male Japanese workers are not primarily motivated by career or income. Recruitment agencies, I believe, provide an excellent and affordable source for Japanese workers seeking employment at Japanese companies based in Singapore, and at the same time, provide Japanese women the opportunities to experience another lifestyle. The agencies' skills to supply skilled labour for Japanese companies abroad, which in turn, has fuelled a demand amongst Japanese women to work abroad, has further strengthened the agencies' role in the Japanese labour market.

Concluding Remarks

This chapter has attempted to explain why Singapore is an attractive operational location for recruitment agencies. As an economy and society that experiences a high rate of job turnover, the workforce in Singapore, both locals and foreigners (i.e., the Japanese, among others), often change jobs. Moreover, many job seekers use recruitment agencies and their websites to procure employment.

   As Singapore develops into a globalised city, its demand for managerial, professional entrepreneurial and highly skilled labour continues to increase. These highly skilled workers are extremely mobile, and regard Singapore as a steppingstone for their global business career. The impact of this labour development and its rippling effects on the various skill levels of the labour market, both within Singapore as well as abroad, are significant. Female Japanese workers, who are attuned to and familiar with Japanese business culture, are but one important group within the international workforce, which has felt the effects of this development.

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