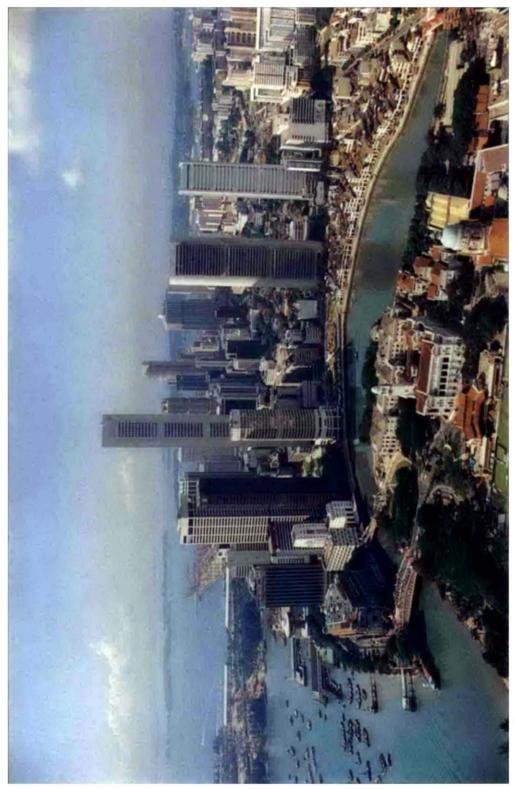
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# MANAGEMENT OF SUCCESS THE MOULDING OF MODERN SINGAPORE



Central Singapore from the helipad of the seventy-three storey Westin Stamford Hotel. (Photograph by the Editors.)

# MANAGEMENT OF SUCCESS THE MOULDING OF MODERN SINGAPORE

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#### INSTITUTE OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES

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#### **PREFACE**

small lozenge-shaped island a mere 42 km. from east to west by 23 km. from north to south, devoid of significant natural resources other than a nodal location; and constituted as a colony in a crumbling empire - such was Singapore immediately prior to its attainment of internal self-government in 1959. The entrepôt functions that had dominated its economy since the founding of the city in 1819 were stagnating and its once pre-eminent role in imperial defence strategy becoming progressively less relevant to the political rivalries of the second half of the twentieth century. The concentration of at least a third of its 1.5 million polyglot, but ethnically segregated, population in 4 sq. miles in the south of the island had resulted in a severe housing shortage that was exacerbated by widespread decay of the housing stock, fragmented land ownership that inhibited planning and development, and unrestrained population growth. Fewer than one in five dwellings was furnished with sewer-connected sanitary facilities. Industry was poorly developed and its expansion hindered by, among other things, a public transport system that was inefficient by any standard other than profitability and controlled by a management obdurately unresponsive to the needs of the populace. It followed that unemployment and underemployment were endemic and poverty ubiquitous. Education, so far as the government was concerned, was élitist, separatist, and based in both principle and substance on the English model: communities whose members did not wish to avail themselves of an English-language education were left very largely to their own resources, with the result that only one out of two inhabitants was literate in any of the island's languages. Predictably there was only a poorly developed sense of public life; opportunities for participating in civic endeavour transcending ethnic interests were rare, and the electoral franchise, except at the very end of the period, severely restricted. The stability that had hitherto generally characterized British rule was being subverted by an ethnic chauvinusm manifested in so-called "racial" rioting and student militancy, and the likelihood of a strong government emerging from impending general elections appeared slim as the conservatively inclined parties were in disarray and the left wing riven by bitter antagonisms between democratic socialists and pro-communists. In any case, the chances were - or so it seemed - that whichever party prevailed in the elections was doomed eventually to be subverted by communal recusancy or communist intransigeance. As for complete

political independence, it seemed an impracticable dream, and even decolonization through some form of merger with independent Malaya a possibility only in a distant future.

Some thirty years later the island and its people have been transformed beyond anything that could have been reasonably envisaged in 1959. What was then an ideal has been conjured into something approaching reality. Communism has been repudiated and communalism rendered quiescent. Singapore is now a modern, secular, independent republic with a parliamentary system in the charge of one of the most stable and respected governments in Asia. It boasts an advanced mixed-enterprise economy with a high rate of growth, an exceptionally strong currency, one of the lowest inflation rates in the world, and what must surely be the highest rate of personal saving. It is also a focus of vigorous crossborder and cross-currency financial transactions, is an especially favoured locale for transnational corporations, and supports an around-the-clock, global financial market. Its port is pre-eminent in the world in tonnage of both ships handled and bunkers delivered, and its oil installations are third in refining capacity. It is also the world's third largest oil-trading centre and the second largest builder of drilling rigs. Its manufacturing sector is characterized by sophisticated technology and automation, especially in relation to information services, with the electronics industry pre-empting no less than a quarter of the work-force; as a result, the city is well on the way to becoming a major regional information centre. Its population of 2.6 millions has been partially re-deployed across the island in comprehensively planned and virtually self-sufficient new towns and housing estates, and the discordant, slum-ridden fabric of the old urban nucleus on the south side of the island reworked into a modern, efficiently serviced, tropical garden city. Today over four-fifths of the island's inhabitants reside in governmentadministered, predominantly high-rise, flats, more than two-thirds of which are owner-occupied or on the way to becoming so, and which are replete with the durable consumer goods common in the industrial nations of the West. Almost all homes are furnished with sewer-connected sanitary facilities. Population growth has been brought under control, life expectancy raised considerably, and infant mortality reduced below that obtaining in the United States. Unemployment is maintained at a very low level, while a standard of living second in Asia only to that of Japan and underpinned by generous retirement provisions is producing a substantial middle class whose interests are beginning to transcend the old loyalties of kin, language, and religion. A revamped educational system integrated with the practice of development planning is providing a skilled and adaptable work-force. A preventive and deterrent mode of law enforcement, combined with the active involvement of neighbourhood groups in social control, ensures that crime rates are lower than those in most Western nations. And a thoroughly modernized infrastructure of utilities, communications, and transport, the last including both a mass rapid transit system and one of the world's most successful airlines, make for comfort and convenience in what Singaporeans properly call their global city.

These are the remarkable transformations that have taken place in the Islandrepublic during the last quarter of a century or so, and the chapters in this book attempt to elicit the means by which they have been effected, to assess the measure of their success, and, perhaps, incidentally to gain some understanding of the reasons why the standard prescriptions for development and modernization are so little applicable to the Singapore experience. An introductory outline of the colonial context within which the People's Action Party came to power is followed successively by evaluations of government policy and practice during recent decades (Chapters 2-8), of the restructuring of the economy that has taken place in that time (Chapters 9-20), of the social transformations that have accompanied it (Chapters 21-27), of concomitant modifications in the legal system and cultural matrix of the island (Chapters 28-33), of the manner in which these and other institutional changes have been imprinted on the landscape (Chapters 34-38), of the way in which Singapore is responding to the information revolution (Chapters 39 and 40), and of its handling of security questions and of its conduct of foreign policy (Chapters 40-43). Although the chapters speak for themselves and require no asseverative recapitulations, we have thought it appropriate to add two concluding sections (Chapters 45-49), one probing what we imply when we congratulate ourselves on the absence of corruption in Singapore and expressing what recent changes in life-style mean to a thoughtful resident and a discerning visitor, the other assessing Singapore's achievements in comparison with those of the other Little Dragons and providing a commentary on the volume's findings, as well as casting a glance to the future. All the chapters have been written specially for this volume.

An average annual real-growth rate of 9.9 per cent for nearly two decades as against 3.5 per cent for the world as a whole, high real per capita incomes, full employment, cheap housing for more than two million people, sophisticated industrial technology, a reputation for efficiency and administrative probity, impressive standards of public health and education, a commodious, architecturally imposing, and functionally efficient city - all clearly bespeak success, and it is not the intention of the contributors to or editors of this volume in any way to depreciate those achievements or, with the benefit of hindsight, to second-guess important government decisions. In any case, this last would prove impracticable in the absence of a publicly available record of Cabinet discussions about alternative policies. We have been able only to report the policies that were in fact adopted, describe the manner of their implementation, infer from the structural circumstances of the time and government ex post facto rationales why those policies prevailed over others, and attempt to explain, in so far as the record permits, why they accomplished the results they did. No serious student of the Singapore experience during the past thirty years denies that extraordinary

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advances have been made: it is our purpose not to deny those advances but to elicit the relative degrees and quality of success attained in different sectors of the societal community. In appropriate instances we have also speculated as to whether different policies might have proved more rewarding. Even when a policy or a programme has been adjudged successful, we have tried to assay its unpublicized, perhaps unrecognized or unacknowledged, costs to polity and society. We believe that the resulting essays together offer the most comprehensive evaluation of the achievements of the government and people of Singapore published to date. Previous works in the same vein, it is true, have dealt with certain themes in greater detail than can be undertaken here but none has hitherto attempted to take note, at least in outline, of all the principal subsystems of society. It goes without saying that production of a volume of this size and complexity inevitably entails the preparation of some papers well in advance of others, thereby imposing an earlier cut-off date on the information to be included. In any case, we would stress that this book is neither an attempt to compile a handbook on Singapore, the People's Action Party, or the government, nor a compendium of up-to-date statistics. Rather it is a structured collection of analytical reflections on how Singapore has wrought a transformation of major proportions during the past three decades, and should be read as such. Of course, most of the factual material contained between the covers of this book will already be familiar to Singaporeans, but it cannot be doubted that the great developmental experiment to be described in the following pages merits a much wider audience, and it is those readers whom we have had most in mind during the preparation of this volume. Consequently we have deemed it appropriate to incorporate in the text a certain amount of explanatory material which some Singaporeans may regard as otiose. Explaining the terms compradore or towkay or void deck or providing an extended version of ANZUS may seem supererogatory to Singaporeans who read this book but may well be perceived as useful assistance by an economist in Rio de Janeiro or a sociologist in Chicago.

The circumstance that the government whenever possible has pursued an integrative approach to development in which a single policy has been made to serve a plurality of purposes inevitably introduces an element of artificiality into strictly analytical studies of specific policies. For this reason, and to furnish reader consulting particular sections for comparative materials with sufficient background information to render the data intelligible, we have permitted a minor amount of duplication between chapters, so that almost all of them can be read as self-contained essays. As a concession to the diversity of topics discussed and resulting differences in scholarly styles, we have permitted minor variations between chapters in the mode of referencing, but in all instances adequate information is provided to identify the source in question. In the explicatory notes appended to some chapters full bibliographic citations are provided on first mention but abbreviated titles for the rest of the particular chapter. Personal names are rendered in the transcriptions customarily used by the people

Preface

concerned, even though the resulting forms may not accord with current scientific practice. All money rates quoted in the text are in Singapore dollars unless specified otherwise.

The editors and the contributors wish to thank the Lee Foundation, and especially Mr Lee Seng Gee, for the very generous financial assistance without which the preparation of this volume could not have been undertaken. The editors, for their part, are sensible of the debt they owe to the fifty-four authors who generously permitted their essays to be modified and amended to produce a unitary and cohesive book, as well as to the cadre of colleagues who, during the past five years, have given generously of their time and effort to advance this work in ways too numerous to mention.

Singa pore January 1989 Kernial Singh Sandhu
Paul Wheatley

#### NOTES ON SINGAPORE

#### THE REPUBLIC OF SINGAPORE

## STATISTICAL SUMMARY OF TOPOGRAPHICAL CHARACTERISTICS AT THE BEGINNING OF THE 1980s

(Based mainly on the 1981/82 Land and Building Use Survey by the Planning Department of the Ministry of National Development, Republic of Singapore)

Total land area: 61,810 hectares (618 sq. km.)

Main island: 57,040 hectares (92 per cent of total area); maximum dimensions  $42 \times 23$  km.

More than forty offshore islands: 4,770 hectares (8 per cent of total land area); ranging in size from Pulau Tekong Besar (1,792 hectares) to Pulau Biola (0.4 hectare); 10 per cent increase from 1967 to 1982.

Built-up areas: 25,953 hectares (46 per cent of main island).

Residential uses. 8,716 hectares (15 per cent of area of main island); 530,000 dwelling units (92 per cent of permanent materials); 425,680 flats (80 per cent of housing stock); 400,656 (94 per cent) under HDB management; 24,729 terrace and row houses (5 per cent of housing stock); 14,228 semi-detached houses (3 per cent of housing stock); detached houses (2 per cent of housing stock); 12,141 shophouses (2 per cent of housing stock); 36,666 temporary dwellings (7 per cent of housing stock).

Commercial uses: 803 hectares (2 per cent of area of main island); 8.8 million sq. metres of floor space; 3.2 million sq. metres in shops (36 per cent of total floor space); 3.0 million sq. metres in offices (35 per cent of total floor space); 0.8 million sq. metres in hotels (14,000 hotel rooms occupying 9 per cent of total commercial floor space); 0.7 million sq. metres in restaurants (8 per cent of total floor space).

Industrial uses: 4,118 hectares; 773 hectares on offshore islands; 3,345 hectares on the main island (6 per cent of total land area; 9.8 million sq. metres of

industrial floor space); 6.0 million sq. metres of floor space in detached and semi-detached factories (61 per cent of total industrial floor space); 2.0 million sq. metres of floor space in flatted factories (20 per cent of total industrial floor space); 1.2 million sq. metres in row or terrace factories (12.5 per cent of total industrial floor space); 0.6 million sq. metres in various other industrial buildings, often of a temporary nature (6 per cent of total industrial floor space).

Warehousing: 522 hectares on the main island (1 per cent of total land area); 108 hectares of temporary structures used mainly for open storage; 2.6 million sq. metres of floor space; 68,150 sq. metres in temporary structures (2.6 per cent of total warehousing floor space).

Educational uses: 1,142 hectares, all on the main island (2 per cent of total area on the Island); 271 primary schools, 111 secondary schools, 22 combined or full schools, 16 vocational Institutes, 9 junior colleges, 5 tertiary Institutions.

Telecommunications and public utilities: 1,002 hectares (1.8 per cent of total area of the main island); 35 per cent (349 hectares) for telecommunication stations; 65 per cent for public utilities: sewage treatment 348 hectares; refuse disposal (including incinerators, tipping grounds, and composting plant) 202 hectares, power stations, gasworks, and covered reservoirs 103 hectares.

Transportation: 7,460 hectares (13.1 per cent of total land area). Public roads 4,389 hectares (59 per cent of land used for transportation purposes; 2,500 km.): expressways 246 hectares; collecting roads 519 hectares; arterial roads 1,361 hectares; local roads 2,263 hectares. Airports/airfields 23 per cent of land used for transportation purposes; all other transportation uses (including ports, railways, bus interchanges, vehicle depots, and parking areas) 18 per cent of total land used for transportation purposes

Agricultural uses: 8,101 hectares (14 per cent of area of the main island), 84 per cent of land in this category is in farms licensed by the Department of Primary Production mainly for vegetable production (40,000 tonnes) and livestock farming (895,000 pigs, 32 million chickens, 4.4 million ducks, 525 million eggs).

Open spaces and recreational uses: 1,725 hectares (3 per cent of total area of main island; 0.72 hectares per 1,000 persons). Passive recreation facilities (local and regional parks, nature reserves) 530 hectares (31 per cent of land in open spaces and recreational uses); active recreation facilities (swimming pools, sports centres, beaches, playing fields, polo grounds, golf courses) 1,195 hectares (69 per cent of land in open spaces and recreational uses).

Land vacant or land in the process of being cleared 9,318 hectares (16 per cent of total area of the main island); 80 per cent of vacant land already committed for public development.

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