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**LOCAL RESPONSES TO GLOBALISATION -
THE CASE OF SINGAPORE**

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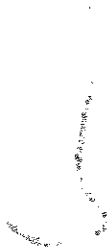
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LOCAL RESPONSES TO GLOBALISATION – THE CASE OF SINGAPORE

INTRODUCTION

“To become a truly global city, Singapore must look beyond the major limitation of its small size, to consider the world as its arena of operation. In marketing products and services, Singapore must look for opportunities elsewhere in the world. When resources, technology or special capabilities are needed, the most competitive sources must be identified and utilised. Singapore must learn to network with other companies on a global basis... More must be done ... to tap the full potential of globalisation” (Strategic Economic Plan 1991:44).

Part of the vision to attain the status of a *global city* is the on-going transformation of Singapore (Regnier 1987) into a ‘*smart city*’ or ‘*intelligent island*’ based on the extensive use of advanced information and communication technologies. One of the pillars of the envisaged globalised knowledge society is the establishment of an electronic network between offices, factories and warehouses, the public and service sectors, the media, educational institutions and private homes via PC and fibre optic cables, as well as the availability of services such as e-mail, electronic data exchange (EDI), teleshopping, electronic banking, telework, etc. According to futurologists Naisbitt & Aburdene (1990:333), this model of a *smart city*, electronically linked both internally and worldwide, represents the quintessential *global city* of the future.

Although Singapore may not yet qualify to be called a ‘truly’ global city, the internationalization of the tiny island republic is remarkable as witnessed by visitors who fly with Singapore’s national carrier Singapore International Airlines (SIA), enter the country through *Changi Airport*, walk through the city’s Central Business District, tour Singapore’s container port, drive through Jurong Industrial Zone where most of the world’s leading manufacturing firms are represented, shop along Orchard Road or chat with friends and relatives overseas in one of Singapore’s internet coffeeshops. What then is a global city? According to the perception of S. Rajaratnam (1972:3-5), Singapore’s first Minister for Foreign Affairs,

“...it is a new form of human organisation and settlement that has ... no precedent in mankind’s past history. People have become aware of this new type of city only very recently... They call it Ecumenopolis – the world embracing city. It is this global character which distinguishes Ecumenopolis or the World City from the cities of the past ... the Global City, now in its infancy, is the child of modern technology ... The Global Cities, unlike

earlier cities, are linked intimately with one another ... they form a chain of cities which today shape and direct, in varying degrees of importance, a world-wide system of economics. It is my contention that Singapore is becoming a component of that system – not a major component but a growingly important one. It is in this sense that I have chosen to describe Singapore as a Global City".

As S. Rajaratnam's statements indicate, the importance of a *global* or *world city* depends largely on its function(s) in the modern world system. According to Cohen (1981:293), the international position of a city depends on its status in the hierarchical international division of labor, which integrates different forms of production under the predominance of transnational corporations (TNCs). The new international division of labour within TNCs has led to the formation of a spatial hierarchy of economic services which comprises world-wide organised production, corporate services and global financial markets. Due to the spatial inflexibility of corporate services, a system of world cities has emerged as centres of global decision-making and corporate strategy planning (Sassen 1991). World cities are thus centres of international big business, i.e. locales of the corporate headquarters of TNCs. The integration into the international system corresponds with specific functions that these cities have to fulfill such as place of business and international organisations, financial centre, node of international transport and traffic flows etc. The most important cities tend to combine several of these functions.

Figure 1: Friedman's Hierarchy of World Cities

World Cities in Core Countries		World Cities in Semi-Peripheral Countries	
Primary	Secondary	Primary	Secondary
London	Bruessel	Mailand	Johannesburg
Paris	Wien	Muenchen	Buenos Aires
Rotterdam	Madrid	Sao Paulo	Rio de Janeiro
Frankfurt	Duesseldorf-Koeln	Singapore	Caracas
Zurich	Barcelona		Mexico
Amsterdam	Lyon		Hong Kong
New York	Toronto		Taipei
Chicago	Miami		Manila
Los Angeles	Houston		Bangkok
Tokyo	San Francisco		Seoul
	Montreal		
	Boston		
	Seattle-Vancouver		
	Sydney		
	Osaka-Kobe		

Source: Friedman 1986:72 and 1995:24

To assess Singapore's city status amidst *world*, *mega* and *global* cities, it might be meaningful to rely on explanatory approaches, which structure the hierarchical system of world cities, by using levels such as 'global', 'zonal' and 'regional' or centre-periphery models based on Wallerstein's (1974) world system theory. Thrift (1986), for example, differentiates between *truly international / global centres* such as New York, London, Paris or Zurich based on criteria such as number of corporate control centres and international banks etc., *zonal centres* like Singapore and Hong Kong, which represent important Asian centres as well as visible nodes and connecting links in the international financial system, and finally *regional centres* such as Sydney or San Francisco, which house the offices of international companies and banks but which play a much lesser role in global finance.

Friedman (1986) sees world cities as nodal points in a worldwide net of controlling markets and production. He distinguishes between so-called 'primary' and 'secondary' world cities in 'core' and 'semi-peripheral' countries. The 'real' world cities are concentrated in the centre of the world economy, i.e. in West Europe, USA and Japan. These core countries form a visible east-west axis through which the world economy is held together and linked - via primary world cities in semi-peripheral countries such as Singapore - with regional economies.

In the age of globalisation, spatial differentiations between 'centre', 'semi-periphery' and 'periphery' are increasingly becoming outdated. One of the characteristics of global cities and the emerging global society is the co-existence of centre and periphery in one locale. Even an ultra-modern city such as Singapore does possess aspects which are normally attributed to cities in the periphery. One example would be the miserable housing conditions of immigrant labor such as construction workers whose dwellings visibly clash with the suburban housing of Singapore's affluent middle class. Not all urban areas reach out to the planet. While Singapore's banking and finance industry around Shenton Way is truly integrated into the world (capital) market system, *Ponggol Point* (a former fishing enclave in the northern part of Singapore which is now being modernized) or *Kelongs* (traditional fish traps on stilts) are not.

Despite methodological problems in assessing Singapore's status as world or global city, it is clear that the survival and economic future of the small resource-poor island republic are inextricably intertwined with its integration into the rapidly expanding global economic system. Against this

Despite methodological problems in assessing Singapore's status as world or global city, it is clear that the survival and economic future of the small resource-poor island republic are inextricably intertwined with its integration into the rapidly expanding global economic system. Against this background, the paper aims to shed some light on Singapore's responses to the process of economic and cultural globalisation, the rationale of transforming the small city state into a *globally integrated smart city*, and the tensions between the globalised environment and national interests by (1) discussing some of the cultural, economic and political consequences of globalisation, (2) illustrating the extent to which Singapore is rooted in the world market system, (3) highlighting some of the strategies pursued to further optimise Singapore's global and regional utility function which is so essential for the city state's future survival and (4) exploring the interconnection between globalisation and a particular local political response: the debate on Asian values and Asia's alternative modernity which was sparked off by Singapore's leadership.

MEGATREND 'GLOBALISATION'

Our world is becoming increasingly interconnected. The worldwide expansion of transport infrastructure has significantly increased mobility across the globe. New and affordable information and communication technologies have made global networking of firms, households and individuals almost fool-proof. The evolution of a 'global marketplace' (Levitt 1983) has been facilitated by increasing borderless flows of capital, goods and services. The mutual dependency of communities and nation states has given rise to the idea of a 'world society' (Luhmann 1986), albeit without a world government. All these developments point to the fact that we are presently witnessing a transformation of major historical significance whose social implications can hardly be fathomed - the trend towards globalisation (Evers 1995; Tong and Lian 1999).

One of the pioneers of globalisation research, Roland Robertson, has described globalisation as 'the compression of the world into a single place' and 'the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole'. Robertson (1990:19) locates the take-off stage of globalisation within the period from 1880 to 1925, which saw a decisive breakthrough in transcultural and transcontinental

communication due to the development of railway networks, the telegraph, sea cable, steamship travel as well as the opening of the Suez Canal. Institutionally, this early phase of internationalisation and global communication manifested itself in the founding of the World Telegraph Union (1865) and the World Radio Union (1906) - both of which were merged to form the International Telecommunication Union in 1932 - as well as the World Postal Union (1874) and the League of Nations (1915).

Due to constant technological innovations and the opening of national telecommunications markets, borderless global communication has become possible to an extent that even outstrips the predictions of futurologists. It seems that the technocratic vision of 'virtually cost free computing power and communication' will come true sooner than expected (see Tables 1 and 2). The PC that was used to write this article costs less than US\$500. It has more computing power than a medium-sized main frame built some 10 years ago (costing in excess of US\$100,000). The use of advanced video-based communications in the form of real-time video conferences, the transmission of graphics or images and the transfer of large files have become a normal business affair due to innovations such as broad-band communication technologies.

As Table 1 illustrates, the capacity of a submarine cable has increased 200 times in a short time span of only 13 years due to the rapid explosion of transmission technology in intercontinental telecommunications. Table 2 provides a rough estimation of the actual costs of connecting two distant continents with a telephone line by using submarine cables. The costs of laying and burying such cables deep into the seabed close to shores or shipping lines are falling rapidly. The actual cost per telephone line for long distance transmission is less than one fifth of a cent per minute (excluding local loops at both ends of the submarine cable, which would be approximately the cost of a local call at each end).

Table 1: Technological Advances in Telecommunications lead to exploding Capacity

Cable Name	Year of Operational Launch	Capacity (in number of simultaneous telephone conversations)
SEA-ME-WE1	1986	1,500
SEA-ME-WE2	1995	15,000
SEA-ME-WE3	1999 (planned)	300,000

Note: SEA-ME-WE stands for South-East Asia (SEA) – the Middle East (ME) – and Western Europe (WE). Source: The Sunday Times, 15.2.1998, p. 24.

Table 2: Current Cost of Communications

Costs	In US\$
Cost of Cable	1.3 bn
Operational costs for 10 yrs	1.3 bn
Total cost over 10 years	2.6 bn
Cost / day	712,300
Cost / day / line	2.37
Cost / day / line / minute	0.0016

Source: The Sunday Times, 15.2.1998, p. 24; Estimates and analyses of the authors.

The concept of globalisation, now a buzz word, first emerged at the end of the sixties, when the American McLuhan highlighted the ‘binding function’ of electronic media. In his book “War and Peace in the Global Village” (1969), he argued that this function allowed, among other things, every American to experience the Vietnam War ‘live’ in the privacy of his or her own living room. Zbigniew Brzezinski also helped to popularise the term globalisation. In his book “Between Two Ages: America’s Role in the Technotronic Era” (1969), he dealt with the ambivalent consequences of the ‘technotronic revolution’, ie. the evolution of a global communication network through computers, TV and other means of telecommunications. Due to America’s international dominance in the area of communications, Zbigniew saw in the USA the first ‘real global society’ in history. Thanks to her culture industries, as well as her innovative techniques, methods and organisational practices, the USA was seen as a global model of modernity with universally applicable laws and values.

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the collapse of the socialist system of central planning confirmed this ideology and were heralded as the triumph of western capitalism and democracy. To

many observers, the failure of communism validated the universality of the West as the only possible one. The year 1989 marked the end of the East-West conflict, which until then had served as a major interpretative model and means of orientation and alignment in international politics. For Francis Fukuyama, former advisor to the US State Department, the new unipolar world signalled the end of history. Other analysts, however, have stressed that the momentous events of 1989 have neither led to the end of history and to a world free of conflict, nor to a new edition of Pax Americana. On the contrary, they have become the harbingers of a new climate of global uncertainty in which the world appears as a “madhouse”, whose analysis defies rational Cartesian logic (Menzel 1995:12; Beck 1998).

Homogenisation

The process of globalisation is accompanied by two seemingly diametrically opposed tendencies: *homogenisation* and heterogenisation. The worldwide dominance and availability of branded consumer goods such as Levis, Marlboro, Coca Cola and services like Microsoft, IBM or CNN, underscores the universalisation and Americanisation of lifestyles. This form of consumer imperialism - aggressively pursued primarily by the industrialised West - threatens to subjugate indigenous peoples and marginal cultures across the globe. In the course of global market expansion, more and more regions are being wired into the *global Coca Cola culture* through satellite television, film and print media, and find themselves frequently at the receiving end in the supply of cultural products essentially produced by the First World (Featherstone 1990). Important agents of this megatrend are media moguls like Rupert Murdoch, Hollywood Inc. and the increasingly dominant transnational companies, which have established themselves in the Third World. It is widely believed that these transnational conglomerates pose an ever-increasing threat to the sovereignty of nation-states.

In the eighties, these powerful global players had searched for a homogenous global culture so as to increase the efficiency and efficacy of their marketing efforts. In recent years, however, many of these firms have been restructured into so-called ‘network enterprises’. In the field of international marketing and management, a subtle change towards emphasising the peculiarities of national cultures

has occurred. While Taylorism saw sharp distinctions between the local, the national and the international spheres, today's globally operating network enterprises require close interaction between all three levels. Japanese management consultants like Kenichi Ohmae speak of 'glocalisation' in this context. This neologism suggests that the strategy employed by network enterprises in taking on the world market should be concurrently local as well as global.

Heterogenisation and Fragmentation

In contrast to those who argue that the worldwide dissemination of new communication technologies homogenises cultural systems and societies towards a single world culture, other analysts have directed their attention to the diversity of cultural systems and their communicative structures to the *fragmentation* of all spheres of life, as well as to the segmentation of both markets and target groups, which evolves from globalisation but which curbs the evolution of a mass culture (Hannerz 1996; Tibi 1997). This *heterogenisation* and *dissipation* in the form of religious and ethnic revivalism, ethno-nationalism, separatism or economic regionalism like the formation of the EU, AFTA or NAFTA, runs counter-clockwise to the process of globalisation.

The rise of ethnic movements in many peripheral countries - aimed at resisting the superimposition of foreign cultures and identity erosion through the emphasis of their own vernacular traditions and the revitalisation or invention of autochthonous cultural patterns and traditional lifestyles – often impedes the painful adaptation to international standards as well as the adoption of innovations. In many cases, it is the political elite who strategically mobilises ethnic sentiments and/or cultural traits of the populace, real or imagined, with the intention of appropriating resources, of distinguishing itself from apparently superior industrial countries in the West and/or of promoting nation-building:

“Typical, in this context, is the use of suggestive models of a society's or group's unique cultural traits which over-emphasise the collective past of the respective entity in the sense that an appeal is made to a common ethnic origin, shared political and cultural experiences over several generations and so forth. All this is an effort to compensate for, or rather, neutralise the loss of national self-esteem suffered through the confrontation of one's own regional or marginal culture with that of a seemingly superior civilisation” (Reimann 1992:18/19).

A similar frame of argument informed the pre-Asian crisis debate over the so-called 'Asian Values' and 'Asia's Renaissance' which can be interpreted as a *local* response of political elites to the processes of economic and cultural globalisation, reflecting Asia's new assertiveness after decades of sustained economic growth, the growing ethnicisation of socio-economic relations in the local and international arena as well as the desire to put a spoke into the rapid globalisation of 'Western' concepts such as human rights, democracy etc.

Disparities and Knowledge Gaps

The globalisation of market and communication systems goes hand in hand with the creation of new intra- and international *disparities* between different countries and regions. As such, globalisation is becoming the source of new demarcations as evidenced by the creation of new more or less exclusive clubs such as the European Community, regional free trade zones or growth triangles. The shifting of regional and global power centres, metropolisation and urbanisation at the cost of rural peripheries, restrictive immigration policies, the illegal emigration of workers under often life-threatening conditions, and the growing dissipation of the industrialised countries in the North from those in the South are some of the consequences of the above process. In the field of communications, these disparities manifest themselves in the unequal distribution of technical know-how, ie. the continually widening *knowledge gap* between developed and developing countries.

In the global market system, the position of countries in the periphery and semi-periphery, their utility function and chances of succeeding economically, rise and fall with the extent to which they excel in knowledge production. More than twenty years ago, Daniel Bell (1973) suggested that *post-industrial nations*, in contrast to industrialis (ed) ing nations, are characterized by the increased generation and codification of theoretical knowledge, rather than by the old axial principle of economic growth and production as the major source of productivity. The creation of value on the basis of knowledge, or more specifically 'applied and worthwhile knowledge' as embodied in technical know-how, product design, R&D etc, is gaining more importance than the possession of natural resources, capital and labour. In post-capitalist knowledge societies, "the central wealth-

creating activities will be neither the allocation of capital to productive uses, nor 'labour'... Value is now created by productivity and innovation, both applications of knowledge to work" (Drucker 1994:8). If this trend is to be taken seriously, Singapore and other newly industrialising countries in Asia must react quickly. Otherwise they run the risk of seeing their present level of development stagnate, and their painstaking efforts at building up relations with Europe, Japan and the US go bust in the medium term. Such a scenario poses an ever-increasing challenge for Singapore's leadership whose political legitimacy is based to a certain extent on the capacity to achieve continual growth in the form of higher real incomes and a steady improvement of living standards. Before we analyse which development strategies are being pursued by Singapore's political and technological elites to meet the challenges of the post-capitalist knowledge society and how policymakers attempt to solve the conflicts between globalisation and national interests, let us examine in what ways and to which extent Singapore has established "a relationship of interdependence" (Rajaratnam 1972:12) in the global market place.

INDICATORS OF SINGAPORE'S INTERNATIONALISATION

Singapore's rapid transformation from a regional port of transshipment (entrepot) to an international hub for trade, finance, services and communications reflects its growing internationalisation and integration into the world economy:

"Singapore could only achieve its current status as a regional business centre, sculpted in spectacularly cold neo-modern architecture, because of the growing interpenetration of the world economy, in which only a few nodal points reach out to the entire planet. For capital flows and financial institutions in perpetual search for fiscal heavens and all-flexible institutional environments, Singapore has become a privileged hub, increasingly competitive with the major Asian centres: Tokyo (too dependent on Japan's global responsibilities and thus, subjected to strong regulations) and Hong Kong (...). The emergence of Singapore as a major business centre also underscores the crucial role of telecommunications and international transportation in determining each city's and country's role in the global economy" (Castells 1988:74/75).

International Transportation Hub

One indicator of Singapore's growing internationalisation is its high volume of international traffic due to her strategic location within Southeast Asia at the crossroads of international air and sea routes. Singapore's *Changi International Airport* is linked to more than 140 cities in 56 countries across the globe and serves as an operation base for 63 airlines. Like the national carrier *Singapore International Airlines* (SIA), Changi airport ranks as one of the most modern of its kind in the world. In 1997, 86,276 aircraft landings were reported in the city state. The number of air passengers arrivals totalled 11.9 million while discharged air cargo had a volume of 696,778 tonnes vis-à-vis 639,570 tonnes of loaded air cargo (Yearbook of Statistics 1997:148-150). Used by some 530 shipping lines, *Singapore's container port* has links with 700 ports around the world and ranks - together with Rotterdam and Hong Kong - as one of the world's top three ports. In 1997, 130,333 vessels arrived in Singapore with a shipping tonnage of 808,305 and total cargo of 327,507 tonnes. Singapore's merchant fleet comprises about 3,400 ships (Yearbook of Statistics Singapore, 1997:147).

Singapore's attraction as an international hub is maintained by *continual investments in infrastructure projects* like the erection of huge and automated warehouses, the undertaking of land reclamation projects or the extension of airport and port facilities. There are *seven free trade zones for sea and air freight* in the tiny city state. In view of land and raw material scarcity, the government supports liberal trade policies and seeks to counteract, as best as it can, protectionist tendencies.

Foreign Direct Investments and MNCs

A further indication of the city state's internationalisation is the sustained influx of *foreign direct investments* (FDI) despite high wage levels, and the current financial and economic crisis affecting East and Southeast Asian economies. In 1997, Singapore remained Asia-Pacific's second largest recipient of FDI, with inflows of US\$10 billion according to estimates of the United Nations (Table 3). The UN defines FDI as consisting of equity capital, reinvested earnings and intra-company loans in all economic sectors, including services. According to Singapore's Economic Development Board, which spearheads the city-state's internationalisation, Singapore received fresh investment

commitments – both local and foreign – in the manufacturing sector of \$8.5 billion in 1997, up from \$8.1 billion in 1996.

Table 3: Top Ten Recipients in South, East and Southeast Asia 1996 and 1997 (US\$ bn)

Economy	1997	1996
China	45.3	40.8
Singapore	10.0	9.4
Indonesia	5.4	6.2
Malaysia	3.8	4.7
Thailand	3.6	2.3
India	3.3	2.4
Hong Kong	2.6	2.5
South Korea	2.3	2.3
Taiwan	2.2	1.9
The Philippines	1.3	1.5
TOTAL	82.4	77.6

Source: UNCTAD as quoted in Straits Times 11-11-1998

Most of the world's leading electronic, chemical and mineral oil giants use the city state as a production base and processing centre, maintaining branches and plants in the state-owned *industrial parks* set up by the Jurong Town Corporation (JTC). Of the about 5,000 TNCs presently operating in Singapore, 850 are in the processing industry, which corresponds to an export volume of roughly half of Singapore's GDP. In addition, there are more than 200 regional and international banks doing business in Singapore (Department of Statistics 1994:118; Savage 1999:143).

Table 4: 1995 Foreign Direct Investments

Rank	Country	FDI outflow (US\$ billions)	FDI inflow*	
			(US\$ billions)	(% of GDP)
1	USA	95.53	60.23 (1)	0.83 (29)
2	United Kingdom	42.36	22.03 (4)	1.99 (17)
3	Germany	34.89	8.94 (10)	0.37 (41)
4	Hong Kong	25.00	2.10 (26)	1.47 (23)
5	Japan	22.66	0.60 (42)	0.00 (45)
6	France	18.73	23.74 (3)	1.54 (21)
7	Netherlands	12.42	10.66 (8)	2.70 (13)
8	Switzerland	11.58	2.60 (21)	0.85 (27)
9	Sweden	10.73	14.27 (6)	6.19 (2)
10	Belgium	7.32	10.27 (9)	3.83 (10)
11	Italy	6.93	4.88 (15)	0.45 (38)
12	Canada	5.76	10.79 (7)	1.91 (18)
13	Singapore	3.91	6.91 (12)	5.60 (3)
14	Australia	3.81	14.31 (5)	4.11 (9)
15	Spain	3.57	6.25 (13)	1.12 (24)
16	Korea	3.53	1.78 (29)	0.39 (40)
17	Luxembourg	3.18	-	5.00 (5)
18	Denmark	2.97	4.14 (19)	2.40 (15)
19	Taiwan	2.68	1.56 (32)	0.57 (35)
20	Malaysia	2.58	5.80 (14)	4.73 (7)
21	China	2.00	35.85 (2)	4.85 (6)
22	Finland	1.68	1.04 (37)	0.84 (28)
23	Norway	1.63	0.62 (41)	0.43 (39)
24	Brazil	1.38	4.86 (16)	0.36 (42)
25	Austria	1.14	1.36 (35)	0.58 (34)
26	New Zealand	0.92	2.51 (23)	4.28 (8)
27	Thailand	0.89	2.07 (27)	0.77 (31)
28	Ireland	0.82	2.32 (25)	3.74 (11)
29	Chile	0.69	1.70 (31)	1.56 (20)
30	Portugal	0.69	0.65 (40)	0.64 (32)
31	Israel	0.67	1.53 (33)	1.76 (19)
32	Indonesia	0.60	4.35 (18)	2.32 (16)
33	Mexico	0.60	6.96 (11)	2.43 (14)
34	Philippines	0.40	1.48 (34)	1.52 (22)
35	Venezuela	0.30	0.90 (38)	0.82 (30)
36	Colombia	0.28	2.50 (24)	2.77 (12)
37	Russia	0.19	2.02 (28)	0.49 (36)
38	Argentina	0.16	1.32 (36)	0.88 (26)
39	Turkey	0.11	0.89 (39)	0.46 (37)
40	Hungary	0.04	4.52 (17)	9.92 (1)
41	Poland	0.04	3.66 (20)	0.96 (25)
42	India	0.04	1.75 (30)	0.60 (33)
43	Czech Republic	0.04	2.57 (22)	5.53 (4)
44	Iceland	0.01	0.00 (43)	0.06 (44)
45	South Africa	-0.33	-0.56 (44)	0.29 (43)

* Ranks for FDI inflow in brackets.

Sources: World Competitiveness Report 1994:332; The World Competitiveness Yearbook 1997:359,362.

Table 5: Total Hourly Compensation for Manufacturing Workers**(Wage plus Supplementary Benefits)**

Rank	Country	Hourly wage (US\$)	
		1993	1996
1	Indonesia	-	0.25
2	Colombia	0.71	0.27
3	India	-	0.32
4	China	-	0.39
5	Russia	-	1.13
6	Mexico	2.65	1.27
7	Venezuela	-	1.34
8	Hungary	1.58	1.40
9	Malaysia	-	1.53
10	Thailand	-	1.61
11	Czech Republic	1.20***	1.64
12	Poland	-	2.09
13	Brazil	2.55	2.53
14	Argentina	3.30	3.69
15	South Africa	0.46	4.17
16	Hong Kong	4.27	4.82
17	Chile	1.80	5.15
18	Portugal	4.61	5.20
19	Taiwan	5.24	5.62
20	Korea	5.37	7.10
21	Singapore	5.38	7.32
22	Greece	7.46	8.61
23	Israel	-	9.99
24	New Zealand	8.00	10.60
25	Iceland	-	12.17
26	Spain	11.55	12.49
27	United Kingdom	12.84	13.63
28	Ireland	13.53	13.79
29	Australia	12.26	15.22
30	Canada	16.36	16.13
31	USA	16.79	17.20
32	Italy	15.96	17.40
33	France	16.32	18.85
34	Luxembourg	21.37**	20.06
35	Japan	19.19	20.44
36	Sweden	17.94	22.74
37	Netherlands	20.17	23.01
38	Denmark	19.12	23.36
39	Finland	16.60	23.60
40	Turkey	-	23.89
41	Norway	20.21	23.95
42	Austria	20.21	24.17
43	Belgium	21.37**	25.58
44	Switzerland	22.67	27.98
45	Germany	25.59*	30.33

*Figure for West Germany. **Combined figure for Belgium/Luxembourg. ***Figure for Czechoslovakia.

Sources: World Competitiveness Report 1994:490; The World Competitiveness Yearbook 1997:423.

Foreign firms significantly contribute to the domestic creation of value. In 1997, the US emerged as the leading investor with a capital expenditure in manufacturing of S\$2.4b, followed by Japan with a total of S\$2.0b, and EU countries, with S\$1.4b. Among the 1,500 Japanese companies operating in Singapore, Sony, Fujikura, Omron, Matsushita, Hitachi, Toshiba and NEC are the most well known. Japanese firms employ a total workforce of about 70,000 people. The investments of local companies amounted to S\$2.6b in 1997. The figures show how dependent Singapore is on foreign capital, know-how and technology.

Main reasons for the confidence of foreign investors include the efficient transportation system, the excellent storage facilities, delivery structure, quality and motivation of the labour force, export-oriented government policies, political stability and legal security. In the past the American consulting firm BERI (Business Environment Risk Intelligence) has ranked Singapore regularly as one of the most attractive investment locations around the globe in terms of quality of labour and so forth which is assessed based on factors such as 'relative productivity' (labor cost per dollar of output), 'workers' attitude' (workdays lost because of labour disputes or absenteeism), 'technical skills' (number of skilled and trained workers compared with market needs) and 'legal framework' (nine factors including how laws protect workers) (Straits Times 29/4/1995).

Labour disputes are virtually unknown because of the high standard of living and other factors. The relationship between the government and the National Trade Union Congress (NTUC) is close. Salary and wage levels, provisions for industrial laws etc. were established by the PAP government in collaboration with the National Wage Council (NWC) founded in 1972. This tripartite committee comprises representatives of trade unions, employers and the government. Each year, it makes suggestions concerning wage increases in line with Singapore's economic situation. Due to increasing labour costs from US\$5.38 per hour in 1993 to US\$7.32 per hour in 1996, Singapore has become one of the most expensive business locations in Asia after Indonesia (US\$ 0.25), China (US\$ 0.39), Malaysia (US\$ 1.53), Thailand (US\$ 1.61), Hong Kong (US\$ 4.82), Taiwan (US\$ 5.62) and Korea (US\$ 7.10) (see Table 5).

To ease the shortage of qualified personnel and knowledge workers, Singapore has brought in some 40,000 overseas experts (mostly managers and technical specialists) who form a *sizeable*

expatriate community which maintains global connections to friends, relatives and business partners with the help of Singapore's excellent telecommunications system.

International Telecommunications

Singapore has established a world class, *internationally linked telecommunications system comprising data transfer, e-mail services and a mobile telecommunications network*. IDD (International Direct Dialing) connections exist with 211 countries. The island republic is leading in the use of *EDI technology* (Electronic Data Interchange) and in mobile telecommunications services. 75% of all office blocks are already linked through fibre optic cables. Two subsidiaries of Singapore Telecom (ST) are responsible for mobile telecommunications: MobileLink sells mobile telephone services, while PageLink markets pagers and other services like 'skypager', 'callzone', 'public mobile data' and 'trunk repeater services'. About one in four Singaporeans used a cellular phone by December 1997, which represents a penetration rate of 23.9 percent. Currently, there are two mobile network operators in the city-state. MobileOne Asia (M1) was granted a 20-year license in 1997 to operate as the second mobile phone network operator next to Singapore Telecom. In April 1998, the government announced the winning bidder for new basic telecommunication service and mobile phone service tenders. StarHub won both the fixed line and mobile phone licenses and will commence operations in April 2000. Singapore has the highest penetration rate in the world for pagers with almost half of all adults carrying one.

International Financial Centre

Next to London, New York and Tokyo, Singapore is one of the most active *foreign exchange trading centres* in the world with a daily average trading volume of US\$100bn. Many leading foreign financial institutes and insurance companies maintain representative offices in Singapore's Central Business District (CBD), which is globally linked through high speed satellites, submarine fibre optic cables and international digital gateways.

Globally Integrated Urban Areas and Localities

The differentiation of social space in Singapore is a further indicator of the internationalisation trend. Over the years, several *globally integrated urban areas* have sprung up across the island such as the glittering stretch of five-star hotels along Orchard Road, the legions of banking and insurance office buildings towering over Shenton Way and Robinson Road, the condominium clusters across the West Coast (predominantly occupied by Japanese expatriates), and the Jurong Industrial Zone with its turn-key plants and factories for foreign investors. Standing their ground in the face of these 'international regions' (Korff 1991) are the various local enclaves (*localities*) such as Little India (Siddique and Puru Shotam 1982). Like Arab Street before, this area is now in the process of being renovated and modernised, and it remains to be seen whether the upgrading process will lead to the displacement of the traditional resident population comprising crafts, cottage industries and small businesses, a predicament not unfamiliar to other urban districts (e.g. Tanjong Pagar) in the past.

Consumerism

The influence of globalisation is also apparent in the media and consumer sectors, both of which aggressively promote consumerism as indicated by the myriad of foreign shopping centres like Japanese-owned Takashimaya (along Orchard Road), the immense popularity of expensive brand names such as Chanel, Issey Miyake, Christian Dior, Karl Lagerfeld, Hugo Boss, Moschino, Yves Saint Laurent, Gianni Versace or Armani and advertising. Consumerism and associated lifestyles continue to be important means of social differentiation for both Singaporeans and overseas visitors (Chua 1998, 1998 ed.). In 1997, Singapore's consumer market attracted about 7.2m tourists who contributed considerably to the GDP with an expenditure of over S\$10,156.3m (Yearbook of Statistics Singapore, 1997:159; Singapore Annual Report on Tourism Statistics 1997:57).

STRATEGIES TO SUSTAIN SINGAPORE'S 'USEFULNESS' IN THE ERA OF GLOBALISATION

In the years 1988 (+11.1%), 1989 (+9.2%), 1990 (+9.0%), 1991 (+7.3%), 1992 (+6.2), 1993 (+10.49%), 1994 (+10.5%), 1995 (+8.7), 1996 (+6.9), and 1997 (+7.8%), Singapore recorded remarkable growth rates (Straits Times 11/11/1998). In the second half of 1997, however, several Asian economies suddenly plunged into turmoil due to the plummeting of regional currencies triggered by the devaluation of the Thai Baht as a result of debt deflation, excessive private-sector leverage and weak financial systems (Rohwer 1998). Though Singapore has reasonably sound monetary policies with zero foreign debt and US\$81 billion in foreign reserves, it was also affected by the region's collapse. Official estimates suggest that Singapore's growth rate would be 0.5% to 1.0% in 1998 and -1.0% to 1.0% in 1999 (Straits Times 11/11/1998). In early 1999, the latter figures were revised to 0 – 2%.

The past recessions (1974/75, 1982 and 1985/86), the sporadic withdrawal of TNCs to cheaper locations and Asia's present economic and financial crisis illustrate Singapore's dependence on global market forces and the investment decisions of global corporations. In view of the changing external conditions and regional division of labour, Singapore needs a permanent market niche. To optimise its traditional utility function both regionally and globally, the government has defined Singapore's long-term role as supra-regional and centre for high value-added activities. The goal is to turn the republic into a *global hi-tech centre* with a sustainable service-oriented economic structure in line with the needs of the industries in ASEAN and foreign TNCs. Correspondingly, through tax, infrastructure and investment incentives, the government is encouraging the *development of hi-tech knowledge and service industries* like microelectronics, information and communications technology, laser- and biotechnology, robot technology, computer-controlled manufacturing etc. and related investments by foreign companies.

Through the setting-up of the 'Singapore Science Park' near the National University of Singapore (NUS), hi-tech farms and the provision of incentives, it is hoped to create *a strong thrust towards the expansion of research & development activities (R&D)*, which until now have been

lagging behind compared with other countries such as Taiwan, Germany, the USA or Japan. In 1996, Singapore's R&D expenditures totalled about 1.4% of its GDP. Taiwan spent 1.9%, Germany 2.3%, the USA 2.4% and Japan 2.9% of its GDP for R&D (The World Competitiveness Yearbook 1998:454). Another location, which has been set aside for R&D firms is the 'International Business Park' in Jurong established by JTC in the western part of Singapore. Two examples of firms operating in the park include home-grown Creative Technologies, a leading producer of PC sound cards, and Transtech Electronics, which assembles VCRs, Hi-fi sets and remote-control toy cars for Sony, Philips, JVC and Panasonic. With an annual turnover of S\$100 million and a workforce of 5,000, Transtech has invested S\$20m in the construction of a high-tech building in the park to house its 150 R&D engineers and designers. In view of Singapore's high wage level and the shortage of manpower, production and assembly work takes place in its five Malaysian plants.

Rising labour costs and property prices, together with the scarcity of land and human resources, have forced Singapore to relocate labour intensive industries elsewhere in the region, like Batam (Indonesia) which together with Johore and Singapore, forms the *SIJORI Growth Triangle*. Batam island lies 20km south of Singapore and belongs to the Indonesian province of Riau. Its new industrial park (Batamindo Industrial Park) was established by Singaporean state-owned enterprises in collaboration with the Salim Group, which belongs to the Indonesian Chinese tycoon, Liem Sioe Liong. Before long, the mostly Javanese workers employed by MNCs on Batam will outnumber the island's indigenous population. Most of these companies are managed from Singapore. The recruitment of migrant workers is strictly monitored, possibly to counteract demands for higher wages. Potential socio-cultural problems include conflicts between the migrant and local populations, and the unequal distribution of the fruits of development. The native inhabitants are dissatisfied with the low compensation for the use of their land as well as the proliferation of squatter settlements (Perry 1991).

Since the recession in the mid eighties, there has been a strong emphasis on the *regionalisation* (China, India, Vietnam and Myanmar) and *globalisation of local companies*. Examples include Yeo Hiap Seng, a food and beverage manufacturer, Jack Chia, a business conglomerate with interests in property development and publishing, INTRACO, a government-

linked trading company or Hong Leong (Lee and Low 1990:212-213). According to Savage (1999:143), the total direct foreign investments of Singapore's 5200 firms increased from S\$ 13.6bn in 1990 to S\$ 36.9bn in 1995. Singapore's 'soft infrastructure', however, is seen as a serious obstacle for the rapid regionalisation and globalisation of local enterprises, and as such, for the successful evolution of the envisaged 'global city'. Singapore's economic planners are convinced that it is imperative to change the mentality of Singaporeans "who must be willing to venture overseas" (Strategic Economic Plan 1991:58). To foster such a change, the Economic Development Board (EDB) has initiated various measures that would prepare Singaporeans for the international scene such as (a) awareness building measures through the establishment of international clubs in local schools, the setting up of an international voluntary work programme under the auspices of the Singapore International Foundation, and providing adequate media coverage of international conditions and developments; (b) introducing courses at tertiary institutes to prepare executives and professionals for working overseas; (c) introducing distance learning programmes which can be used by Singaporeans studying or working overseas to keep in touch with the local school system and (d) minimising any other fiscal or social disincentives for living and working abroad (Program 3 'Becoming Internationally Oriented', Strategic Economic Plan 1991:100).

Besides the further development of banking and finance, other growth potentials lie in the transport and communication sectors. Since the beginning of the eighties, large amounts of resources have been invested in the development of IT industries, a nationwide electronic network, EDI technology and the continual training and upgrading of IT experts. While in 1980 there were only 850 IT specialists in Singapore, by 1991, that number had increased almost seventeen fold to 14,000. Singapore's official "IT Vision" is spelled out in the so-called "IT 2000 Report", which is the blueprint for the transformation of the city-state into an intelligent island as well as a regional information hub. The masterminds behind this report expect Singapore to reach this objective by 1999 through the exploitation of cutting edge communications technology so as to maintain and maximise its competitiveness, and along with that, its utility function both as an international and regional centre for business, transport and services.

In line with the IT2000 plan, Singapore's government has launched the so-called Singapore ONE (One Network for everyone) initiative. Core elements include the setting up of an internationally-linked, *island-wide 'electronic superhighway'* to facilitate the transmission of data, videoimages, computer language and graphic symbols etc., easy access to international databanks and the development of national communications standards. IT enterprises like those offering value-added services are considered especially profitable for key areas like trade, finance, technology, law and tax, or software development. Through the development and commercial use of new wide-band and wireless communication networks and information services (multimedia systems, video-conferencing and interactive long-distance learning), it is hoped that substantial growth impulses can be achieved. B-ISDN has a transmission rate of 150m bits per second and is 1000 times faster than the conventional ISDN (Integrated Services Digital Network) system.

"Singapore ONE is a national initiative to deliver a new level of interactive, multimedia applications and services to homes, businesses and schools throughout Singapore. ... Singapore ONE comprises two distinct but integrated levels. The first is a broadband infrastructure level of high-capacity networks and switches. The second is a level of advanced applications and services that take advantage of the infrastructure's high-speed and high-capacity capabilities. ... Singapore ONE is one of the first few implementations of multimedia broadband networks and applications in the world ...to provide high-speed interactive, multimedia applications and services over the network, not just for the advanced users, but for everyone, and everywhere... With its huge amounts of bandwidth, Singapore ONE will... ..enable users to experience richer, more exciting and interactive content, which includes entertainment and news-on-demand, distance learning, on-line shopping and other electronic commerce services, video conferencing capability, government services, as well as fast Internet. ..." (<http://www.s-one.gov.sg/html>).

Singapore's technocrats are convinced that the setting up of an all-inclusive national information infrastructure (NII) in the form of fibre optic cables, wireless sectoral communications and tetherless computing will bring considerable advantages for businesses in form of shorter production time, greater flexibility and increased international competitiveness. NII is expected to improve intra and inter-company communications and the co-ordination between buyers, suppliers and banks. In the transport sector, an integrated freight system is to be developed so as to improve information and data exchange between carriers, freight agents, shipping companies, airlines, banks, customs and port authorities. Through the establishment of intelligent warehouses and re-distribution

centres, it is hoped that Singapore can sustain its retail trade and regional distribution capacity. The development of an integrated airport and maritime information network is also in the making in order to strengthen Singapore's hub position.

Internet

More and more individuals, companies and public organisations are going online. In 1996 there were about 141,200 Internet users per million inhabitants in Singapore, which had seen the setting up of the first few Internet cafés for net surfers in the early 1990s. Singapore's approach towards the global data highway began in 1990 with the National University of Singapore (NUS) going online and later the setting up of the nation-state's first World Wide Web. In January 1992, this was followed by the founding of Technet, Singapore's first Internet service provider. A year later, Internet was introduced in schools under the supervision of Technet and multimedia specialists from the National Computer Board (NCB) and NUS. In July 1994, the republic's first public Internet service provider, Singnet, was set up under the auspices of Singtel.

Table 6: Internet Users (per million inhabitants, 1996)

Country	No of Internet Users
Finland	244,500
USA	203,400
Singapore	141,200
Hong Kong	64,930
Japan	63,060
Germany	49,760
Taiwan	28,510
Korea	15,050
Malaysia	7,850
Philippines	1,000
Indonesia	420
China	150

Source: Global Competitiveness Report 1998:150

Since March 1995, those interested in the latest political, cultural and economic developments in Singapore can access *Infomap*, Singapore's official Internet Homepage. Respective website information is supplied by the National Library, the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) and

various ministries such as Manpower, Defence and Foreign Affairs. Singaporean newspapers like the Straits Times, The New Paper and Lianhe Zaobao have gone online, too. The privatisation of Technet in September 1995 (now Pacific Internet) has further stimulated demand. Observers expect lower rates and consequent increases in the number of users in the future. Stronger competition from other private Internet providers such as Cyberway (a joint venture between Singapore Press Holdings and Singapore Technologies), which began operations as Singapore's third Internet service provider in 1996, can also be counted on.

Global Electronic Communities

Another vision of the apologetics of the new information and communications technologies is the creation of 'electronic communities' of people with similar views or interests, be it on the basis of ethnicity, clan loyalty, alma mater or membership in professional organisations (Menkhoff and Labig 1996). As suggested by SM Lee Kuan Yew, the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry has initiated a process of electronically linking Chinese business communities worldwide. This form of global networking is endorsed by Kotkin's tribes theory (1992), according to which the increasing global market expansion will lead to the growing importance of Asian ethnic groups like the Chinese and the Indians. Kotkin is convinced that these 'tribes' are important catalysts for the spread of capital, technology and know-how. A prominent example is Liem Sioe Liong's Salim Group (Indonesia) who maintains branches in Africa, Europe and the USA. In Asia, he is involved in joint ventures with Thai agrobusiness millionaire, Dhanin Chearavanont, and Malaysia's 'Sugar King', Robert Kuok (Menkhoff 1993; 1998).

The rise of 'global Asian tribes' such as the ethnic Chinese and Indians has been attributed to communal values and virtues (in the form of a strong ethnic identity, self-help, family orientation, as well as virtues such as hard work, learning and savings ethics), the evolution of a transnational economy and the rapid development of information and communications technologies:

"New telecommunications and transportation technologies (again forged ahead largely by the Anglo-Americans) allowed dispersed members of these Asian groups to stay in touch, many of whose operations depend heavily on traditional, highly consensual Asian business forms, from the Japanese keiretsu to the Indian joint-family companies and the Chinese family networks" (Kotkin 1992).

It is believed that technological innovations such as EDI or video-conferencing have facilitated the initiation of contacts and the maintenance of ethnic transnational socio-economic network relationships whose nodes are seen in the Chinatowns and the Little Indias from London to Kuala Lumpur. While empirical data to substantiate Kotkin's theses are difficult to collect, the idea of pan-national ethnic communities, real or imagined, is gaining wider support as evidenced by the series of 'World Chinese Entrepreneurs Conventions' co-organised by Singapore's government (Tong and Lian 1999:23-24). Empirical analyses of 'Chinese' business networks suggest that the often anticipated 'exclusive tribal identity of the Chinese diaspora' and associated images are imagined and constructed for various reasons (Menkhoff 1998).

THE POLITICAL CONSTRUCTION OF 'ASIAN VALUES' – A LOCAL RESPONSE TO GLOBALISATION

An interesting phenomenon of Asia's rise has been the emergence of a new 'ethno-cultural awareness' as evidenced by the *pre-Asian* crisis discourse on Asian values. As the Singaporean politician-cum-academician Tommy Koh put it in 1993, the social contract in East Asia between the state and the people is one of 10 Asian values (Straits Times 4/12/93) on which the Asian economic miracle is based. 'Good', 'fair' and 'humane' leaders (and bureaucrats) earn respect and loyalty as long as they guarantee the fulfillment of basic needs. Singapore's economic success has strengthened this 'social contract' which may be one of the reasons why most Singaporeans silently acquiesce to the hierarchical order prescribed by the government.

As SM Lee argued a couple of years ago, the economic transformation of East Asia will eventually lead to a reaffirmation of Asian culture, Asian traditions and Asian values:

"The influence of the West on our lifestyles, foods, fashions, politics and the media will drop ... and Asian influence will increase ... The question whether Asian or Western values are better will not be settled by argument alone. It will be settled by the economic transformation of East Asia" (The Straits Times 6-2-1995).

The 'decay of the West' - as illustrated by its 'destructive' individualism, materialism 'without morals', the 'breakdown' of the family, 'increasing' crime rates, media power, welfarism etc. - has been interpreted as 'proof' of the moral superiority of Asian cultural traditions and values. What is often overlooked, however, is the fact that 'modernization' (rather than Westernization) had also significant effects on the social structure and value systems of East- and Southeast Asian societies as evidenced by the erosion of extended families, increasing divorce rates, individualism, domestic violence etc. This might partly explain why 'the moral decay of Singapore's society' turned out to be a major concern for 71% of the respondents who participated in a recent lifestyle study on Singapore conducted by faculty of the Dept. of Marketing, Faculty of Business Administration, National University of Singapore (Table 7).

Table 7: Attitudes towards Moral Standards, Religion and Traditions

	Disagree	Neutral	Agree
	(%)	(%)	(%)
The moral decay of our society is a major concern.	2.5	26.1	71.4
It is wrong to have sex before marriage.	11.7	29.1	59.2
Religion is an important part of my life.	12.2	32.4	55.3
I celebrate festivals in the traditional way.	5.4	40.9	53.8
Divorce is unacceptable.	26.3	40.5	33.3

Note: All items were measured on a six-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly disagree, Disagree, Somewhat disagree, Somewhat agree, Agree, to Strongly agree. For parsimony of presentation, the following scale items were combined: Strongly disagree and Disagree is simply shown as Disagree, Somewhat disagree and Somewhat agree is shown as Neutral, and Agree and Strongly agree is shown as Agree.

Source: Kau, Tan and Wirtz 1998

The manner in which 'Asian' values have been propagated and instrumentalised by various groups in the past, the cultural and religious heterogeneity of 'Asia' as well as the on-going cause-effect analyses of Asia's downturn (some analysts have linked the debacle to 'phenomena' such as corruption, collusion and nepotism) point to the methodological difficulty of establishing *causal*

relationships between values as independent variable and the process of economic development as dependent variable. More apparent is the efficiency and ‘usefulness’ of Asian values as political multiple purpose arm.

Singapore’s (as well as Malaysia’s) political leaders have been front runners in the fight against the West’s stranglehold on defining values, ethics and democracy. The emphasis and promotion of *local* identities, cultural traditions and traditional values, real or imagined, can be attributed to the desire to preserve and invigorate values that help to strengthen the cohesion and identity of multicultural communities in these vulnerable young modern nation states with open economies. The justification of political power and authority in terms of political legitimacy may represent another motive. Globalisation brings with it the spread of Western concepts such as freedom, civil society, human rights and democracy. This facet of globalisation is sometimes perceived as a threat by political elites who respond locally by accentuating local peculiarities and/or constructing shields such as ‘Asian’ values. The legitimacy of Singapore’s ruling People’s Action Party (PAP) is increasingly measured in terms of steadily improving living standards, the provision of (cheap) public goods and facilities as well as the fulfillment of the demands of certain strata of Singapore’s population for more co-determination rights. Conflicts and tensions between globalisation and Singapore’s growing interpenetration with the world economy, the spread of western liberal individualism which globalisation brings along, the ongoing nation-building project and national interests represent a constant challenge for Singapore’s government.

CONCLUSIONS

The essay has shown that Singapore is an important nodal point in the interpenetrated world economy. Its geo-strategic position and internationally-linked world class telecommunications system, high inflows of FDI by transnational corporations, its function as international finance, business and transportation hub, as well as the increasing share of the service sector in the GDP indicate that the small island republic has become an important node in the global, hierarchically structured system of

world cities, a system which reflects the new international division of labor and the increasing globalisation.

Notwithstanding its classification as primary world city in the semi-periphery by Wallersteinians, its small size etc., Singapore's political and economic leaders are optimistic that the island can be successfully transformed in what has been alternating officially termed as *world-class city* or *global city* by investing in capital, technology, education, intelligent buildings etc. and by raising the quality of life (Strategic Economic Plan 1991:42-43) in general. The configuration of a "global city" is a central objective of Singapore's development policies. The specific goals as set out in the Strategic Economic Plan, such as greater capacity for technical innovation and R&D activities, exploitation of new regional markets such as China, India, Vietnam or Myanmar, globalisation of local firms and greater international mobility of Singaporean managers etc., indicate that the government is willing and in some sense almost forced to further optimise Singapore's regional and global utility function, without which its chances for survival in future remains low.

If we take global economic or political power as sole indicators, Singapore can hardly be classified as a 'global city', and neither the perfection of its island-wide, global electronic network nor the transformation into a 'smart city' are likely to change that. In spite of its successful industrial development from an entrepôt to newly industrialized country status (Menkhoff and Wirtz 1988) and its huge foreign exchange reserves, it is clear that the country will remain heavily dependent on the US, Japan and the EU, for technology, know-how, capital and markets.

Singapore's development strategies rest on the notion that new technologies and service quality represent key competencies and competitive advantages in the new global virtual economy. A central role in the knowledge society envisaged is played by information and communications technologies which have accelerated the globalisation of markets and global finance. In the age of broadband technology, information and knowledge can be at one's disposal in a split of a second. Speed has become a decisive factor for economic success of both nation states and enterprises in the age of globalisation. All these points explain the significance of Singapore's IT agenda which is being implemented since the early 70s, aimed at safeguarding Singapore's competitiveness in the era of information and knowledge societies.

Singapore's leaders are confident that the new technologies have a positive impact on economy and society. Often cited examples include the sectoral network 'MediNet' or the computerisation of the public service, both of which have greatly improved public health and administration. At the same time, however, some critics have stressed that Singapore has taken a more or less great leap backwards, as indicated by the fact that the state has monitored private Internet users to curb the transmission of pornographic materials in Cyberspace.

Controversy surrounds the question of the extent to which the Internet threatens the sovereignty of the state. The government's legal options to control both private Internet users and commercial Internet providers, and to monitor the adherence to state-prescribed codes of conduct have generated just as much contention. While the regulation of the media and thereby the consumption of foreign programmes and 'cultural products' can be relatively smoothly managed due to Singapore's small size, the Internet presents politicians with a dilemma. On the one hand, they are eager that Singaporeans master the new information and communications technologies. On the other, however, they are afraid of negative external influences and the erosion of Singaporeans' cultural identity. As Minister for Information and the Arts, George Yeo, pointed out during the official launching of Singapore Infomap: "The choice is either we master technology, or it will master us" (Straits Times 2/1/1996).

The Internet dilemma is symptomatic of the tensions and antagonisms which arise from the process of globalisation. At one end, Singapore is faced with the pressure to conform globally and exposed to the impact of foreign powers in the area of culture and technology, an example of which being the Americanisation of lifestyles. At the opposite end, it is simultaneously placing emphasis on its own cultural traditions, as evidenced by the revitalisation of autochthonous cultural patterns, real or imagined, and the political construction of Asian values as political multiple purpose arm. Another example is the ban of private satellite antennae to receive foreign programmes and the policy to develop the island into an information and media hub, as illustrated by the presence of foreign news agencies and TV networks like Reuters, MTV, Asia Business News or the Disney Channel in Singapore.

Despite strict government regulation, the influence of the mass media and TV culture is omnipresent (one has the choice of six official channels in Singapore, half of which are Malaysian). Especially the younger generation is prone to this influence, bombarded on both fronts by popular western culture (that of Hollywood in particular) and by Japanese cultural imports (Tamagotchis and the rest of its ilk). Singapore's politicians fear that international consumerism, and in particular the indiscriminate consumption of western cultural imports will erode the cultural identity of Singaporeans, which itself evolved as a *hybrid culture* from the ashes of its colonial past, traditional values and various ethno-religious practices.

How fast traditional patterns of living, outlook on life and sociocultural values such as respect for authority, thrift, hard work etc. will eventually be replaced by postindustrial and postmodern value systems in the course of globalisation remains to be seen. Some members of the materially privileged English-speaking elite, which is so vital for Singapore's international standing, have already proven themselves to be susceptible to alternative lifestyles. Recently, the government intervened in the doling out of all-too-generous allowances to teenagers and the inculcation of filial piety which is now codified. Yet, until now, no empirical proof has emerged that might determine any definite trend. For the majority of the population, the 5 Cs (cash, condominium, car, credit card and club membership) do still represent sufficient incentives to the work ethic.

The propagation of traditional (Asian) values by Singaporean (and Malaysian) politicians and the sharp criticism leveled against the value systems of the 'economically stagnating' West have to be interpreted as reflex actions against decades of western subordination in the form of international market domination and the West's monopoly with regard to the definition of democracy, human rights and modernity. Mr. Tommy Koh, one of the early apologetics of "Asian values" and now Executive Director of the Asia-Europe Foundation in Singapore, interprets the debate over the Asian values as manifestation of East Asia's psychological and intellectual liberation from the Western dominance of the last 200 years (Straits Times 20/12/1998). Other explanatory factors include issues of power (and political legitimacy) in the face of a prospering middle class clammering for more say in the political arena, the ethnic, cultural and religious heterogeneity of the population and the desire to maintain

ethnic harmony, the perceived fragility as a *nation* surrounded by strong Islamic countries and last but not least Singapore's dependence on regional and world markets in the age of globalisation.

The discourse on Asia's own modernity will continue despite the current economic and financial crisis. For Koh, the Asian crisis is "a blessing in disguise" since it has taught five major lessons: (i) avoid borrowing short-term to finance long-term projects, (ii) make more efficient use of capital instead over-investments in real estate and the stock market, (iii) ensure good corporate governance and abolish crony capitalism, (iv) do not align your currency too closely to one currency such as the US dollar and (v) strengthen your financial institutions and regulatory framework before the liberalisation of capital accounts. Koh is convinced that the "East Asian miracle is not over" since the region's fundamentals such as work ethic, commitment to manpower development, high savings, support for free trade and pro-growth policies are still strong, the fact that some of the early victims of the crisis such as Thailand and Korea are recuperating and the current implementation of reform measures and restructuring activities to counteract policy mistakes and institutional flaws (Straits Times 20/12/1998). Only time will tell, whether he will be right in the end.

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