

The influence of geopolitical factors on the history of Singapore

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28-06-2021

Master History

Specialization Global History and International Relations

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ABSTRACT

This research is about Singapore, a city-state that in less than hundred years has grown into a very prosperous country. Singapore occupies a special position in Southeast Asia. I mapped the history of the Strait of Malacca and then investigated to what extent geopolitical factors have influenced Singapore's developments and thereby the government. By using secondary literature and speeches by government officials I have mapped out which geopolitical factors had the greatest influence. Singapore has been ingenious in its handling of the strengths and weaknesses of the region. Both in the field of domestic and foreign policy.

Singapore, Southeast Asia, Geopolitical factors, Lee Kuan Yew, Domestic and Foreign policy, Speeches, US, China.

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Introduction

Within the Strait of Malacca lies the independent city state of Singapore, also known as “The lion city,” according to a legend the first visitors of today’s Singapore island landed on a shore called Temasek and spotted a strange animal which they identified as a lion. Because of this they declared they would establish a city named Singapura, which means lion city in Sanskrit.¹

Nowadays Singapore ranks as sixth among cities in economic power exceeded only by big cities like New York, London and Tokyo. World Bank rates Singapore as number one in the ease of doing business overall. In thirty years, Singapore’s GDP grew from 500 dollar to 1500 dollar and the percentage of people looking for jobs is under two percent. To achieve and sustain this economic record education has proven the ultimate key. Singaporeans are committed to the English language however most of them speak a second or even a third language as well, an asset that for example America could find useful in an increasingly globalizing world. Except for its widespread economic interest, Singapore has a non-interventionist foreign policy, The Financial Times called Singapore “Zurich from the East”, being influential far beyond its size. Another big reason for its success is Singapore’s geography. Singapore is for example only a fraction of Rhode Island but still the population pushes over five million people. Singapore lacks any natural assets except a port located at the Strait of Malacca, one of the world most strategic sea lanes, connecting the Pacific with the Indian ocean. Singapore commands the east entrance of the Strait which forms a vital part of the current global route between Europe and Asia. Powerful people like Sir Stamford Raffles saw the potential of the location and took advantage of it. Sir Stamford Raffles is known as the founder of Singapore in 1819. Another important person was the first prime minister of Singapore Lee Kuan Yew. His clever mind and sharp tongue shaped an extraordinary political career. Lee is the one responsible for what is Singapore today.²

Despite its small size, the island city-state is a heavyweight in regional and international affairs. A close strategic partner of the United States in Southeast Asia, Singapore also maintains a close relationship with China. In recent years, it has pursued a

¹ John Perry, *Singapore: Unlikely Power* (New York 2017), 10.

² *Ibidem*, 5-9.

balanced foreign policy, seeking to avoid getting caught up in the global competition between the two countries.³

In this thesis I will examine the history of Singapore through a geopolitical scope and analyze how these factors influenced Singapore's decisions. It is necessary to know the history of the region starting in the 15th century to appreciate where Singapore has come from and what long term patterns always have influenced the region.

³ Ankit Panda, "Singapore: A Small Asian Heavyweight". *Council on Foreign Relations*.
<https://www.cfr.org/background/Singapore-small-asian-heavyweight>.

Research question

In this thesis I will explore the history of Singapore and establish the role geopolitical factors have played and will play in it. The main question of the thesis will therefore be to what extent did geopolitical factors influence Singapore's policy from 1965 to 2018. Few scholars have actually linked the geopolitical factors to the domestic and foreign policies of Singapore. In this thesis I will investigate this connection in more detail.

With the different chapters I will explore the history of Singapore within Southeast Asia to give some context on the region and its developments. I will explain how the city state went from a pre-modern Strait Settlement to an independent state. Then I will separate domestic and foreign policy of modern Singapore to establish to what extent geopolitical factors influences the policies. Within the domestic chapter I will talk about the governance of Singapore and the economy of Singapore. Within the chapter of foreign policy, I will look into the global and regional affairs Singapore has with the US and China.

The region discussed will be Southeast Asia. For the purpose of context, I will also briefly address the 15th century when the Strait of Malacca was ruled by the Malaccan sultanate. The main period of my research is still 1965 to 2018.

This periodization has been chosen because in 1965 Singapore became an independent city state and underwent spectacular economic growth, Singapore soared "from third world to first."⁴ To answer the main question it is also important to have the historical context of Singapore and the region to see which geopolitical factors already play a role for a long time.

This subject sparked my interest because of the knowledge I already possessed of Southeast Asia, mainly about developments in the Strait from the 15th century until the 18th century. By picking Singapore as a case study, I can extend my knowledge to more contemporary history and link these. I'm very content with my theoretical framework. The combination of geopolitical factors and policy is very interesting and will deliver some innovative insights.

⁴ Felix Chang, "The Odd Couple: Singapore's Relations with China" - *Foreign Policy Research Institute*. <https://www.fpri.org/article/2019/12/the-odd-couple-singapores-relations-with-china/>.

Theoretical framework

The theory that will mostly be referred to in this work is geopolitics. Geopolitics studies the effects of human and physical geography on international politics and especially on international relations. Geopolitics focuses on political power, investigating diplomatic history in relation to geographic space.⁵ For example, waterways, trade routes and natural resources can play a major role. We see that besides international relations and politics also economic and social factors are being taken into account.

Geopolitics as a discipline exists for a long time, although it only became a scholarly subject around 1890 when the term was invented by Rudolf Kjellen (1864-1922) in 1899. His definition for geopolitics is “the theory of the state as a geographical organism or phenomenon in space.”⁶ This idea of a state being an organic and changing entity was unusual for the time. Also, around this time Anglo American scholars like Alfred Mahan (1840-1914) and Halford Mackinder (1861-1947) made distinction in geopolitics between land and sea powers. Mahan explained how maritime powers like Japan, or the United States try to control sea lines in order to improve or maintain power. Mackinder on the other hand analyzed the trend from sea powers to land powers concerning the decline of the British Empire. In Anglo-American classical geopolitics the effects of location, geomorphological and topographical conditions for national expansion and national power are regarded as being essential. The Anglo-American branch of classical geopolitics was primarily about understanding politics based on considerations of location and physical geography and providing advice to politicians accordingly. Halford Mackinder made this epistemology most explicit, saying that “*geographical features govern or, at least, guide history*”. However, this does not mean that nature automatically dictates the decisions made by humans.

More recent scholars, like Robert Kaplan (1952-) and Michael Klare (1942-), are much closer to the classical branch of geopolitics. Kaplan explains in his book *The Revenge of Geography* that geographical factors matter. Thinking geopolitically means recognizing, as he says: “*the most blunt, uncomfortable, and deterministic of truths: those of geography.*”⁷ Klare argues that national power in the 21st century is determined by the ability of countries to keep hold of resources and their ability to get to resources in particular oil. Klare

⁵ Ralph Wrobel, "Chinese Geopolitics in Southeast Asia: A New Pattern of Economic Power within ASEAN?" *Asiatische Studien* 73, no. 1 (2019): 147-189.

⁶ Rudolf Kjellen, *Staten som livsform*, (Gebers, 1916) 34-35.

⁷ Robert Kaplan, *The Revenge of Geography: What the Map Tells Us about Coming Conflicts and the Battle Against Fate* (New York 2012), 28.

emphasizes that the frequency and character of future warfare will depend on three factors that are related: the political environment in which decisions on resource issues are taken, the demand for resources and their supply and their spatial characteristics.

Sören Scholvin presents a theoretical refinement of Kaplan's and Klare's work in the way of three pillars of geopolitics. These pillars bring together the classical and contemporary geopolitics. This approach focusses on the physical reality that states face. Within this frame geographical conditions are understood as location, physical geography and man-made structures in geographical space.⁸

The first pillar of his refined theory is recognizing that geographical conditions must not be seen as an irreversible fate. Geographical conditions are, rather, a set of obstacles and opportunities. By this he means a structure that is independent of agency. These conditions do not dictate what we do but they determine what is rational. Even if one does not assume that humans act rationally, examining the geographical context will still lead to sound results because geographical conditions often constitute a sine qua non for social processes. Understanding geographical conditions thus enables us to explain various social phenomena to a great extent.⁹

Second, geographical conditions can help to explain general patterns and long-term processes. They are of much less use when it comes to case-specific particularities and short-term developments.¹⁰

The third pillar states that in order to show that geographical conditions matter and in what way, it is helpful to trace processes and to concentrate on the role of geographical conditions therein. Non-geographical factors have to be recognized for this to work. Soren states that technology appears to be an important intervening factor. For example, rivers can form a hurdle for the expansion of a state. However, improvements in navigation can turn a river into a way which ships can transport goods and people, now what used to be hurdle becomes a step towards national expansion. Another major intervening factor is politics. The conflicts about resources Klare mentions in his work are not only influenced by the capacity of resource-scare countries to substitute the resources they lack. The scramble for resources, including the change of conflicts over these resources, also depends on the political environment in which decisions are taken.¹¹

⁸ S. Scholvin, 'geopolitics an overview of concepts and empirical examples from international relations', *FIIA Working Paper*, nr. 91 (2016): 20.

⁹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, 25.

¹¹ *Ibidem*.

By following these three pillars I will prove the relevance of geographical conditions and explain that geopolitical factors do not affect things on their own but only do so in interaction with non-geographical factors like politics.

Literature review

This literature review will start with the history of the Southeast Asian region from the 15th century towards the 18th century. The different entrepots in the Strait and their importance. The European interference in Asia followed by the establishment of Singapore by the English. Subsequently literature about the pre-modern era of Singapore with the continuation to the independence of the state will be reviewed. Literature about the history of Southeast Asia and Singapore is very rich and will be used in this thesis. This literature review will look into the historiography of the region and development of Singapore. These developments are well presented in secondary literature. The historiography is mostly Asian (Chinese and Singaporean) and American. All the works used are recent, with a few older books but non written before 1980.

Anthony Reid is one of the main scholars on Southeast Asia. In his books *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce 1450-1680* volume I and II he provides a view on the history from the perspective of the people of Southeast Asia. The first volume dealt with social life and material culture. The second volume Reid discusses economic, political, and religious changes in that period. Reid offers a large and detailed work of the history of Southeast Asia.

Reid states that particularly the maritime regions were influenced and altered by the commercial revolution. The most sought-after products and spices like pepper, cloves and nutmeg were grown in Southeast Asia for export during the age of commerce. Many of the actors in the commercial expansion were locals. Large urban entrepots like Malacca grew and prospered in the Strait, being an important trade intersection. Rulers of these entrepots tried to build absolutist states and used revenues from trade to build their ships for trade and war, to essentially increase their influence in the hinterlands, and to further gain in maritime commerce.

Leonard and Barbara Andaya work together on this next work: *A History of Early Modern Southeast Asia, 1400-1830*. this important work is easy to read but still full of important insights. The first chapters in the book are about the geographical factors of the region. Chapter two explains the period pre-1400. The following chapters are divided into time frames of 1400-1511 *beginning of an era*, 1511-1600 *acceleration of change*, 1600-1690 *expanding global links and their impact on Southeast Asia*, 1690-1780 *new boundaries and changing regimes* and 1780-1830 *the last phase*.

The work of Leonard and Barbara Andaya is seen as a major contribution to the debate in the history of Southeast Asia. Therefore, it was very useful for the chapters on the entrepôts in the Straits and the European interference.

Menno Witteveens *Antonio van Diemen: de opkomst van de VOC*, in combination with Els Jacobs: *Koopman in Azie* were the most notable sources for the part about the VOC. How this relates to contemporary Singapore will become clear in the chapter itself. However, because of the role the VOC played in Southeast Asia in the Strait of Malacca, this literature is needed to understand the context. Witteveen shows the critical choices the Dutch trade organization made to establish a rendezvous point in Asia. The issues he states that VOC couldn't be a soldier and merchant at the same time, dictates the progress of the Southeast Asian history. The need of a central point was the decisive factor for the VOC to consider the taking of Malacca.

With the work of Jacobs, it becomes clear that the Company had managed to work as a major player in the Asian trade market between the Chinese, Arab and Indian traders in Asia in a very pragmatic way. The company was built in the seventeenth century with a limited number of monopolies, combined with a refined extensive network of trading posts that varied according to the situation and the market. This method was rewarded during the eighteenth century. The Company also managed to hold its own among the other European competitors for a long time. However, it became increasingly difficult to escape the political entanglements that plagued the Asian region and changed the balance of power there. Participation in several wars meant that the costs that the Company had to incur in order to continue trade increased. The shifts in power in Asia also resulted in trade contacts being cut off and certain products no longer being available at all. In addition, the changing market in Europe also made it difficult to achieve profits. Unfortunately, developments in Europe (the Napoleonic wars) led to the demise of the Company.

The next literary sources are about the history of Singapore during the pre-modern and modern times of the city state.

John Perry for example provides a complete history of Singapore in his book '*Singapore: Unlikely Power*' that ranges from its Malay origins to the present day. Singapore is blessed with a strategic position in the Strait of Malacca, a natural deep-water port and is protected by mountainous terrain. The city state has been a major trading entrepôt throughout history. China was the first to exploit the islands' strategic location. Because of this relation

during the 14th and 15th century many people from China emigrated to Singapore. However, it was Britain who ruled over Singapore as colonizer until the 1960s. From the early nineteenth century onward, Singapore was a vital node in the global economy, which relied on oceanic shipping and the protection of the British Navy. Perry covers all of this before turning to the era of independence, which began in the 1965. Many of the usual ills from which former colonies suffer plagued Singapore. Ills like corruption, inequality and a lack of educated population. Contrary to expectations Singapore went from third-world status into a first world over the course of just three decades. The leader of the PAP (People's Action Party) Lee Kuan Yew did what other post-colonial leaders avoided. Yew embraced Singapore's colonial past and adopted a resolutely pragmatist approach to economic development rather than following an ideological program. Perry's work helps to get a first overview of the history of Singapore and will also give a small inside in the early Sino-Singapore relationship. Perry wanted to show how inspiring contemporary Singapore is. He believes it is important to admire the courage with which Singapore has faced and overcome adversity.

Another work very useful and comprehensive to understand Malaysian and Singapore history is Jim Bakers book "*Crossroads: A Popular History of Malaysia and Singapore*". In this work Baker traces the complex currents of history and politics of Malaysia and Singapore. Just as Perry's work, this book gives a complete view of the history of the region. Bakers' chapters about Singapore since its independence touch on political, cultural, regional and economic questions Singapore must face. For that reason, this book cannot be missed in my thesis.

Michael Barr's *Singapore: A Modern History* is more than just the history of the city state. He suggests that there is another way of seeing Singapore's history. He suggests seeing the development of Singapore as central to trade and political relations between the territories which now make up China, Indonesia, India and Malaysia. The arrival of the British just made the story of Singapore complicated but according to him didn't make Singapore to what it is today. Barr thus poses an alternative way of understanding Singapore's role as a world city and tiny trading nation. He discusses the location of the city in Singapore's history as something of major importance. The core of his work is on the governance of premodern, modern and independent Singapore following its separation from the Federation of Malaysia in 1965. Maybe his book doesn't change how the world sees Singapore, this different angle should not be ignored when studying Singapore's history.

Singapore in Global History edited by Derek Heng and Syed Muhd Khairudin Aljunied is what Leonard Andaya calls: “a work that globalizes history and historicizes globalization,” as he states in the preface of the book. Andaya argues that given Singapore’s history of global connection it can only seem natural to view Singapore’s history through the wider scope of global history. Heng’s book consists of 13 essays written by different scholars in an effort to view Singapore’s history through many different scopes. The chapters cover topics on Singapore’s political, economic, social, military history and also themes like early state formation and the evolution of its port and trading networks from pre-modern to colonial times.

The editors succeeded in bringing together different themes and disciplinary fields but still providing a certain logic behind it. What Heng achieved in collaboration with the contributors are new views on the regional and global history of Singapore.

A view on the relation between Singapore and the great powers with a geopolitical touch is important for the thesis. An article written by Robyn Klinger Vidra called “*The Pragmatic ‘Little Red Dot’: Singapore’s US Hedge against China*” analyses how Singapore responds to the challenge posed by the strategic interests of the US and China in their geography and economy. It’s focus on geopolitics is important for this thesis and broadens the spectrum of the relationships. Nicholas Kitchen, the editor of the report, states that: “Southeast Asia has long been a crucially important region in world politics. The Cold War may have begun and ended in Europe, but it was waged most fiercely in Southeast Asia.” According to Kitchen the developments in Asia will dictate the landscape of international politics over the coming decades. For example, the unprecedented economic rise of China will make them one of the largest economies in the world. China made progress in forging new economic links with the region it turned away from. Its support during the recent crisis has convinced states in Southeast Asia that China’s economic goals are friendly.

Kitchen argues that nonetheless, in Southeast Asia the ‘great game’ of geopolitics is alive and well. Territorial disputes in the South China Sea for example. Regional states encounter an inflexible China. Also, an example of geopolitics in the region is the acclaimed American ‘pivot’ to the region. This can be seen as Washington’s effort to ‘rebalance’ its foreign policy to focus on the challenge posed by China’s rise. This American effort allows Southeast Asian states to hedge against China’s more obscure intentions. At the same time, America’s return to the region also provokes suspicions of its deeper purpose.

Within this context Southeast Asian states risk becoming pawns in a geopolitical clash between the two superpowers, China and the US.

This report analyses per state how they are responding to this challenge. The scholars argue that most states have a more friendly view of America's intentions than of China's. Most regional states see opportunity in being the object of the superpowers' interest. Yet it's dangerous for these countries desiring bilateral gains with the superpowers because they may carry the cost of sacrificing wider regional interests.

A very recent article by Felix Chang, published in 2019 tackles the Singapore-China relationship with care. Starting in 2016 when the relationship between the two could be considered at their lowest point. Chang examines the relationship from three angles: diplomatic, economic and military. Chang starts by explaining why the relationship is so special. The appeal of how to create economic prosperity under one-party rule was one of the reasons China wanted to tighten their bonds with Singapore, for China also wanted to reform economically and rebrand communism into Chinese socialism. In 1992 the Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping even said that China saw Singapore as "the model they should follow for development." Because of this good relationship with China's top leaders' Singaporean leaders felt that they could always work out problems if they occurred. But as China economically rise grew and at the same time its military power the countries began to drift apart. Around this time Chang argues that Singapore began binding with other powers like India, Japan and the United States.

Chang continues by analyzing the military steps both countries took in recent years. Singapore is the only Southeast Asian country that has been able to keep pace with China's expanding military power. Singapore even permitted the United States to station combat ships at Singapore's naval base since 2013 and to fly anti-submarine aircrafts from their air base since 2015. Distrust between China and Singapore started in 2004 when a Chinese Chairman spoke of the "Malacca Strait dilemma" meaning Chinese lack of control over the Malacca Strait. For both countries this waterway is of much importance. The Strait of Malacca is Singapore's economic lifeline and for China the waterway controls 80 percent of their oil import.

Next is the economic relation between them. Singapore's central selling point is its location. Within this chapter we see how geopolitics and the economy of Singapore and China are intertwined. Singapore could become East Asia's leading maritime trading center and serve as a major base for high-tech manufacturing, largely because of its location astride the

Strait of Malacca. Singaporeans initially welcomed China's economic rise. Greater economic growth in China meant more trade and profits for Singapore. But recently things are changing. With the start of China's belt and road initiative, China wants to redraw the world trade routes. This redraw of trade could have significance for Singapore. Because these new routes will mostly go over land and continental Southeast Asia than through Singapore's waterway. Because of this future Chinese growth may come at the expense of Singapore. For Singapore's national interest its vital to keep trade flowing through the strait of malacca and to stay on top of the market.

Chang's final point argues about the political bond between Singapore and China. Within the last decade, since Xi Jinping became China's current leader, Chang argues that China seems to have come to regard Singapore as more like any other Southeast Asian country, rather than something special. He concludes that Singapore's relationship with China has evolved. It is not so friendly as it once was. The reason is not because China seeks to dominate Singapore, but rather because China no longer sees Singapore as particularly special. China may always have a soft spot for Singapore, a country with an ethnic Chinese majority, but this feeling has limits, as seen in Hong Kong.

The last work in this literature report is also the most recent by Sebastian Strangio. In this work Strangio provides an extensive research on how China's power is rapidly reshaping the region of Southeast Asia. China's economic and military emergence is very apparent in Southeast Asia. Since the end of the Cold War, China has risen from a mid-table power to an economic, military and even cultural force. Countries in Southeast Asia are unusually exposed to the expanding power of the new China. Three Southeast Asian nations share land borders with China, five of them are directly affected by China's claims in the South China Sea. But all dwell in the expanding shadow of its power: economic, political, military and cultural. The attitude towards China can best be described as fraught. As China has become the most important economic partner. Southeast Asian countries cannot ignore China's economic centrality in the region. Each of the nations in Southeast Asia face similar challenges in adapting to the changing balance of power in the Indo-pacific region, yet no country approaches these challenges in the same way. Strangio touches on Southeast Asia in the wider context of China's geopolitical ambitions and its long march back to national wealth and power in chapter one. Chapter two is also important because here he focuses on the Southeast Asian mainland, describing the process of economic integration and opening up the region for Chinese flow of investment and immigration. Chapter seven touches on the origins and nature

of China's maritime ambition and its impact on Singapore, because Singapore is most reliant on the global flow of goods and capital.

Sources and Methods

The methodology used throughout this thesis will be a qualitative content analysis of the sources.

As one of my primary sources I will use speeches. Speeches from political figures like the Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Minister of Foreign Affairs. The speeches and interviews are collected from The National Archives of Singapore (NAS). This is the official custodian of Singapore's collective memory. Ranging from government files, private memoirs, historical maps and photographs to oral history interviews and audio-visual materials, the NAS is responsible for the collection, preservation and management of Singapore's public and private archival records. This website is helpful to access many Singaporean sources to use for research.

By using speeches from Singapore's first Prime Minister, Lee Kuan Yew, I will be able to extract his thoughts about geopolitical factors in his domestic and foreign policy. These speeches have not often been used as a primary source. Many scholars prefer archival works instead of speeches, but as Miriam Dobson and Benjamin Ziemann state in their work about the use of primary sources: "historians have always made use of speeches when doing research."¹² The importance of the speeches is that they show Lee's public statements on international and national matters. The interpretation of his words can also be established from the speeches itself. Lee says that he tries to strike a balance between maintaining confidence and stability, with the need to inform/alert people. And on the other hand, being polite and truthful.¹³

This approach will also involve the analysis of certain databases from IMF (International Monetary Fund) and World Bank to analyze the economic developments of Singapore.

The World Bank databases can be used as essential tools for supporting management decisions and provide information for operational activities. The application of internationally accepted standards and norms results in a consistent, reliable source of information. However, the World Bank isn't free of political influences and agendas. So the data must be viewed critically.

¹² Dobson, Miriam and Benjamin Ziemann, *Reading Primary Sources: The Interpretation of Texts from Nineteenth- and Twentieth-century History*. (London Routledge, 2009).

¹³ Address by Lee Kuan Yew, Prime Minister of Singapore, at the Asia society dinner in New York 12 May 1975, <https://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/speeches/record-details/73b28345-115d-11e3-83d5-0050568939ad>

The other primary information comes from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). This is an organization where 188 countries work together to foster global monetary cooperation, secure financial stability, facilitate international trade, promote high employment and sustainable economic growth and reduce poverty around the world. The IMF is viewed as one of the world's most authoritative sources for economic information, analysis and harmonized statistics for different countries. The IMF publications comprise data and analysis of almost every economy in the world. The combination of both raw data and secondary sources will give me a clear view of the evolution of Singapore.

The chosen sources can be used to answer the thesis question. They were comprehensive and accessible in regard to the history of Singapore, their domestic and foreign policy and the influence of geopolitical factors.

The innovative aspect of this thesis comes primarily from the use of the theoretical framework and the primary sources, mainly the speeches. There aren't many scholars who primarily focus on geopolitical factors when analyzing the policy of Singapore. Many, like Michael Barr and John Perry, argue that location is important for the success of Singapore's history but none of these scholars use a similar angle. This approach makes for an extensive observation on geopolitical factors and shows how they have influenced past, present and will influence the future of Singapore. Also, the primary sources used for the research is something not many scholars use and thus adding to the uniqueness of this study. The methodology is not very innovative as this will rely on content analyses.

Towards a modern Singapore

Introduction

The first part of the research focuses on the history of Singapore and the Strait of Malacca from the 15th to the 20th century. In order to clarify this history and to investigate the different capacities of the region, especially Malacca, various literature on the Indian Ocean trade, the Portuguese empire and the VOC in Asia was used. The emergence of Malacca as a Malaysian stacking market is described in the first paragraph, after which the next paragraph highlights Portuguese domination. The third paragraph will focus on the domination of the VOC in Malacca. To close the European interference part in the fourth paragraph the English dominance will be examined. This chapter is important to understand the rise of Singapore in later centuries.

After creating this historic image, this chapter proceeds towards pre-modern Singapore under British rule until independence in 1965.

By knowing the context, the geopolitical patterns within the region become clear.

Entrepots in the strait of Malacca

Earliest “Singapore”

The Strait of Malacca has always been a region of wealth and prosperity. Long before the establishing of Singapore another entrepot was founded in this region. As the name of this strait suggest that place was Malacca, one of the most important trading ports of Southeast Asia for over 300 years. In the 15th century Malacca was labeled as the most prosperous entrepot in Southeast Asia.¹⁴ How Malacca got this central function within the trade routes of Asia and how the power relations changed will be explained. The monsoon, location of the city, recognition and protection of the Chinese empire and the incorporation in the Chinese trade routes made Malacca one of the most important trade ports of the Indian ocean.

The monsoon, or musim in Malay, is the seasonal wind that determines the rainy season in Asia. The evenness and predictability of the monsoon determined the currents of

¹⁴ Dianne Lewis, *Jan Compagnie in the Straits of Malacca, 1641-1795* (Athens 1995), 1.

Asian sea trade.¹⁵ From April to August, monsoon winds mainly blow north inland and from December to March mainly southwards, towards the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea. Chinese and Japanese vessels sailing towards the South China Sea took advantage of the northern monsoon winds in January and February. In June, July or August they returned when the monsoon wind came from the south. Ships from India that sailed across the Indian Ocean used the monsoon wind just as it came from the south to sail safely east. If the traders wanted to, they could make the return journey with the same wind, but many traders chose to stay and trade in the region until December. 'Below the winds' meant people stayed in the entrepot to avoid the cyclone winds in October and return home later in the year. This seasonal shipping created warehouses in various places in Southeast Asia. Here traders could wait for the change in monsoon winds or wait for the arrival of trading partners. The large warehouses 'below the winds' were necessarily located on the intersections of the places defined by the monsoon wind, such as the Strait of Malacca. Malacca provided a safe haven for the traders and also provided an opportunity to trade between the change of monsoon winds.¹⁶

Until 1400, the Kingdom of Srivijaya in Palembang, Sumatra, controlled the region. Attacks from Java and India destroyed the kingdom, and thus the city-state ports in Palembang and Temasek (early Singapore). The ruler of Temasek fled and the population followed. They settled on the east coast of the Malacca Peninsula, where they found their new home in Malacca, just 127 miles far from today's Singapore.¹⁷

The ancient kingdom of Srivijaya previously had ties with the Orang Laut, seafaring people who stayed on the islands at the openings of the Strait of Malacca. This linkage was cited by the new inhabitants of Malacca. By giving the head of the Orang Laut great prestige to the court of Malacca, Malacca was able to deploy the Orang Laut both as friendly escorts of traders and as hostile looters. Malacca's rulers also gave the leaders of the Orang Laut certain courteous titles or goods and were sometimes allowed to marry noble women of the court.¹⁸

In addition to the Orang Laut, the rulers also had a strategic alliance with the Minangkabau from Sumatra. This indigenous population provided trade products from the

¹⁵ Anthony Reid, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce 1450-1680, volume two: Expansion and crisis* (New Haven and London 1993) 64.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, 64-65.

¹⁷ Perry, *Singapore: Unlikely Power*, 13.

¹⁸ Barbara Andaya and Leonard Andaya, *A history of early modern Southeast Asia, 1400-1830* (Cambridge 2015) 101.

inlands. Every respectable warehouse wanted to be able to offer domestic products to trade with, this alliance gave Malacca extra prestige within and outward the Malaysian Peninsula.¹⁹

For Malacca, it was very important that traders from China, Java, Siam and Pasai were attracted, but these different groups were not allowed to become too powerful and dominate Malacca. For this reason, the then ruler of Malacca, Parameswara (1344-1424), also turned to the Chinese emperor, in order to protect Malacca from established foreign powers. The ruling Yongle emperor wanted to take on this role of merciful protector and so Malacca gained Chinese support. With this support Malacca gained a stronger position in the region and Parameswara was able to secure its rule. The Yongle emperor conducted trade expeditions that stimulated the production of goods for the Chinese market. In addition, Malacca acquired the right to organize court trips to China with the aim of consolidating mutual understanding. China sent a fleet to Malacca six times in recognition of Parameswara's power. Malacca, in turn, sent 29 missions to China.²⁰ This recognition by the Chinese emperor ensured that Malacca sustained local power in 1435.²¹

Malacca could also become a prosperous warehouse because the city played an important role in Chinese trade. Until the 17th century, China was the main market for goods from Southeast Asia. Changes in Chinese policy affected all of Southeast Asia. Products that were particularly important in the South China Sea trade, pepper and sandalwood, were shipped to China in large quantities because they were used there for mass consumption. Pepper was also used as a means of payment for Chinese soldiers and officials. Trading cities like Malacca owe their early growth to this Chinese trade.²²

The main traders in the areas around the Strait of Malacca were the Malays, Chinese, Japanese and Javanese. In the 16th century, the Europeans arrived. The parties each took their own products to the Strait of Malacca and then traded them in Malacca. Pepper from India, gold and silver brought by the Chinese and Japanese and various spices such as cloves and nutmeg from the Moluccas. The variety of traders and products allowed Malacca to assume its role as a warehouse.²³ By 1430 Muhammad Shah, the then ruler of Malacca, had converted to Islam. As a result, a lucrative connection was made between the Islamic world

¹⁹ Ibidem, 103-104.

²⁰ Reid, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce*, 16.

²¹ Ibidem, 204-206.

²² Reid, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce*, 12-13.

²³ Ibidem.

and Malacca. Muslim traders visited Malacca therefore more often and this turned the place also into an Islamic regional center.²⁴

During sultan Mansur Syah's reign from 1459-1477, the influence of Malacca was at its peak. Malacca's rulers claimed hegemony over the peninsula and the east coast of Sumatra and considered themselves invincible thanks to China's support. However, this attitude fed the urge of surrounding states to thwart Malacca. That explained their willingness to support the Portuguese in their struggle for the conquest of Malacca.

Malacca gained its position as a leading warehouse in the region due to multiple factors. As Andaya and Reid mention in their works, recognition and protection from the Chinese emperor meant Malacca could generate enough power to hold its own among its neighboring competitors. In addition, their analysis shows how Malacca benefited from its strategic location in the narrowest part of the Strait of Malacca. Ships that sailed through this strait always had to pass through the city. Combined with the seasonal monsoon, this made Malacca a place where traders from all over the world came together. By being included in Chinese trade missions, Malacca secured its position as a warehouse and thus experienced economic growth as early as 1400. By forming different alliances, in addition to the Chinese protectorate, the balance of power in the region shifted in favor of Malacca. All in all, Malacca held economic and strategic hegemony over the Peninsula and the East Coast of Sumatra until 1511.

European interference

Portuguese

In 1511 Malacca was conquered by the Portuguese, led by Afonso de Albuquerque (1434-1515), then Governor of Portuguese Asia. This ended the self-government of the Asian entrepot. The Sultanate of Malacca was simply moved by the Portuguese to nearby Johore after its capture, from where part of the old stacking market function continued. Albeit now shared with Portuguese Malacca.²⁵

Malacca's role in the Portuguese empire remained almost the same both strategically and commercially as before the Portuguese intake. The Portuguese came to Asia in the 16th

²⁴ Andaya and Andaya, *A history of early modern Southeast Asia*, 102.

²⁵ Piet Emmer and Jos Gommans, *Rijk aan de rand van de wereld: De geschiedenis van Nederland overzee 1600-1800* (Amsterdam 2012) 286.

century mainly because of the lucrative spice trade and with Malacca conquered they were able to take full advantage of this. Spices from the Moluccas, which came to Malacca through the existing Inter-Asian trade, the Portuguese could now buy directly and ship to Portugal. As a result, the previous Red Sea intermediaries, who normally resold the goods to the Portuguese at high prices, were now passed. However, the Portuguese's conquest of Malacca did not hinder existing interregional trade.²⁶ With Malacca, the Portuguese controlled the Strait of Malacca and this meant that all trade from the Indian Ocean to the South China Sea could be regulated by the Portuguese.²⁷

After the conquest of Malacca by the Portuguese, the balance of power in the region shifted. Sultan Mahmud, the ruler of Malacca, fled to the southernmost tip of the Malay Peninsula near the Johore River. Together with a number of subjects, he founded Johore in this place with the intention of forming a new Malacca. However, Johore was unable to generate enough revenue, which was partly caused by the constant threat from Portugal and local rivals such as The Islamic Aceh. As a result, Johore could not become the intended central trading post in the Strait of Malacca.²⁸ Other subjects of the Sultan had fled to existing warehouses such as Aceh. The arrival of the Portuguese had changed the political hegemony in the region and Aceh was able to benefit from it. Muslim traders who had visited Malacca frequently had now moved to Aceh.²⁹ By concluding treaties with the Ottoman Sultan Sulayman, the Sultan of Aceh was able to count on military support in their fight against the Portuguese. Despite many attempts, however, Aceh was unable to break the Portuguese's defense in Malacca. The Portuguese, with their war fleet and fortifications present, were well able to withstand the Turkish cannons. The poison arrows of soldiers from Aceh posed a greater threat.³⁰ Also, from Johore and Java several attempts were made to attack Malacca but none of these attempts were successful. An alliance of Aceh and Johore against the Portuguese might have been more effective, but this was incompatible with the desire of both trading ports to obtain sole rule in the Strait of Malacca.³¹

²⁶ Reid, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce*, 67.

²⁷ Marie Meilink-Roelofs, *Asian trade and European influence: In the Indonesian Archipelago between 1500 and about 1600* (Den Haag 1962) 136.

²⁸ Andaya and Andaya, *A history of early modern Southeast Asia*, 152.

²⁹ Leonard Andaya, *The kingdom of Johor, 1641-1728* (Kuala Lumpur 1976) 22.

³⁰ Andaya and Andaya, *A history of early modern Southeast Asia*, 153.

³¹ *Ibidem*.

The VOC

In the beginning of the 17th century when the Dutch discovered the trade routes to Pacific Asia, intense rivalry sprang up between the Dutch and the Portuguese, who claimed exclusive rights in these waters.³²

At the time of the founding of the VOC, there was no intention to create a permanent establishment in Asia. In these years, the VOC was in a bad financial position. This was caused by the dual nature of the Company. On the one hand, the VOC was known as "merchant in Asia" and on the other hand as "warlord in Asia": a military organization.³³ The military aspect was supported by regimes in the Netherlands as a weapon against the Spanish and Portuguese enemies both in Europe and in Asia. Offensive operations were expected of generals where trading activities were subordinate.³⁴ Cornelis Matelieff de Jonge (1570-1632) was admiral of the second fleet that left for Asia in 1605.³⁵ In his memoirs, written both during his stay in Asia and after his return to the Netherlands, he is critical of the choices of the VOC. Matelieff failed in his offensive operations and stated that this was a result of the contradiction of his instructions. He indicated that you couldn't be a soldier and a merchant at the same time. He also indicated that it was important to have a 'fixed fundament'.³⁶ A central point or rendezvous. Malacca, he said, could be the solution to the financial problems facing the VOC. Without a central point, there was not always the possibility for Dutch ships to stock up on trade products. Due to the lack of their own central point, the ships and their crew regularly had to wait a long time for a cargo of merchandise to be available. Since the crew had to be paid in this waiting period, this was a costly matter. For this reason, it was better to have a central point where staff could arrange the supply and storage of products even before the ships arrived from Europe. A facility could also serve as a transshipment point.³⁷

For a permanent establishment in Asia, the VOC had its eye on Malacca, Bantam and Jakarta. Due to the flourishing trade in Malacca, the VOC saw this city as the most suitable candidate for the intended central point. In order to conquer Malacca, the Dutch sought

³² Perry, *Singapore: Unlikely Power*, 24.

³³ Gerrit-Jan Knaap, *De Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie: Tussen oorlog en diplomatie* (Leiden 2002) 35.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, 40.

³⁵ Menno Witteveen, *Antonio van Diemen, de opkomst van de VOC in Azië* (Amsterdam 2011) 63.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, 69-70.

³⁷ Peter Borschberg, *The value of admiral Matelieff's writings for studying the history of Southeast Asia, c.1600-1620* (Singapore 2017) 423.

support from the Sultan of Johore, whose ancestors had been driven out of Malacca by the Portuguese at the time. In 1605 Matelieff signed a treaty with the sultan and in 1606 Malacca was attacked. It soon became clear that there would be no rapid conquest. The Portuguese had a large amount of war ammunition and had placed good defenses around Malacca. Since the conquest of Malacca had failed for the time being and establishment in Bantam was also not possible for political reasons, the VOC was now forced to turn its attention to Jakarta.³⁸

In 1619 Jakarta was conquered by Jan Pietersz. Coen. Jakarta was renamed Batavia and although the VOC had realized the desired permanent fortress in Southeast Asia, Malacca remained important for the VOC, even though Malacca was no longer necessary as a permanent establishment.³⁹ The fact that the city was still dominated by the Portuguese remained an eyesore for the VOC.⁴⁰ The Portuguese were able to control shipping around the Strait of Malacca from the city, this sea narrow was the main connection and trade route between east and west Asia. The VOC wanted to implement this street in their trading network. As long as the Portuguese were based here, there was no question of security.⁴¹

In 1640, a large fleet, led by Jacob Koper, departed Batavia to besiege Malacca.⁴² The hope of a quick conquest of the city soon disappeared, the Portuguese managed to break Dutch blockades, so they could still provide the city with food. With a long siege, the Dutch hoped to get the Portuguese on their knees. Company soldiers remained out of the reach of the cannons that fired bullets at the Dutch from Malacca and in the meantime tried to storm and shell the city alternately in order to break the resistance of the Portuguese. When it turned out that Malacca was still holding out, the Dutch went on to starve the inhabitants of the city. Many residents died of starvation and women and children fled the city as much as possible. But also, on the part of the VOC, large losses were suffered due to illness and malnutrition. Under the leadership of captain Caertekoe, the last storming of the severely weakened Malacca took place in 1641. The VOC managed to force a major breach in the defensive wall of the city and the conquest of Malacca was therefore a fact.⁴³ With this victory the Dutch could lodge themselves securely on the Asian continent as well as the archipelago, there seemed little room left for any other Europeans.

³⁸ Witteveen, *Antonio van Diemen*, 71.

³⁹ Els Jacobs, *koopman in Azië: De handel van de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie tijdens de 18^e eeuw* (Zutphen 2000) 154.

⁴⁰ F. W. Stapel, *Pieter van Dam's beschrijvinge van de Oostindische Compagnie 1639-1701* ('s-Gravenhage 1927) 329.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*.

⁴² *Ibidem*, 330.

⁴³ *Ibidem*.

The English

England was another European country that made an attempt to establish itself in the archipelago trade in the 17th century. Both the Dutch and the English were seafaring nations with a lot in common. Both were religious enemies of the Portuguese and Spanish, and their commercial interest were in conflict with them.⁴⁴

England's interest in Southeast Asia was just as the Dutch represented by a joint stock company being the EIC, short for English East India Company. This led to a conflict of interest between England and the Netherlands. The EIC and the VOC were competing private companies with the same goals in Asia, making profits. However, a combination of factors made the EIC a minor force in the region until the second half of the 18th century. One factor was the position which the VOC had developed in the spice trade. If the English wanted to participate, they would have to pay for it.⁴⁵ Another factor was the power the VOC had in the region. An example of this power can be found in the "Massacre of Ambonia", where the Dutch killed a third of the English trading community, claiming the English conspired to capture the VOC fortress. Faced with this hostile climate, the English withdrew and maintained a low profile in the region. Another reason the EIC kept a low profile in Southeast Asia was that it was more interested in developing its trading empire in India with its limited capital resources. As a result of this choice English trade in the archipelago was left to country traders. Country traders were private merchants who either owned their own ships or were masters of vessels owned by companies based in EIC ports in India and operating under EIC license.⁴⁶

Renewed English interest in Asia emerged in the 19th century. One of the reasons for this change was the growing appetite for tea. This made the English increasingly interested in developing trade with China. Demand for Chinese tea grew from 7.3 million kilograms in 1785 to double that amount over the next thirty years.⁴⁷ At the same time there was also demand for products from the straits, especially tin. However, there was one problem with the trade for tea and tin. There weren't much products China was interested in trading with the English either from Europa or India. They had always traded cotton textile from India for the tin and Chinese tea, but there was fierce competition with the VOC and Arabs who also

⁴⁴ Jim Baker, *Crossroads: A Popular History of Malaysia and Singapore*. (Singapore 2008) 73.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, 74.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, 75.

traded in textiles. For that reason, the English had to pay for their tea in silver. This concept of paying with silver for a product was contrary to the idea of a profit-making mercantilist trading empire.⁴⁸ When in the 18th century the EIC went into the opium business, this problem was solved. The drug had been a trading product but on a minor scale for some time. Now the English expanded their opium trade, by paying Indian farmers to grow opium and promoting the trade with credit facilities to the country traders. They created the perfect trading commodity. With opium they had a product that would create an increasing demand and one in which the English had a monopoly.⁴⁹

Because of European power rivalries, increase in trade and the boost of the opium sales an English port and base in Southeast Asia in the archipelago was necessary. They needed a place that could collect trade products like the tin and tea, between the India and China trade. The English always looked for islands when constructing their empire since islands could easier be protected by ships and didn't need large armies. They needed a place where traders could get "refreshments", a safe place in which to repair, refit and replenish ships. Their wooden vessels demanded high maintenance and were fragile even under the best circumstance, especially in tropical waters. It also had to be a place that could function as naval base to protect the trade.⁵⁰

In 1795 against all odds and despite their favorable position the Dutch lost Malacca to the English. Causes for this loss were not found in Asia but in Europe, where the Napoleonic wars had broken out. King William V of the Netherlands fled to England for the French. There he wrote Kew's letters in 1795. In these letters, William V ordered all Dutch colonial territories to be transferred to the English. In this way he wanted to prevent the areas from falling into French hands. Governor Couperus then handed Malacca over to the English without firing a single shot.⁵¹ 154 years of Dutch history in Malacca came to an end. In 1818 the Dutch returned to Southeast Asia, but much had changed. In 1819, the English established a new port south of Malacca, named Singapore. In the past centuries Singapore Island had played no noticeable part in the European entry into the Strait. The people living on the island had moved elsewhere long before and the land had largely reverted into jungle and swamp. When the English set foot on the island little remained apart from the legend of the vibrant life of the Temasek-Singapura past.⁵² This new stacking market made Malacca fade. The

⁴⁸ Ibidem, 76

⁴⁹ Ibidem.

⁵⁰ Perry, *Singapore: Unlikely Power*, 27-28.

⁵¹ Lewis, *Jan Compagnie in the Straits of Malacca*, 124.

⁵² Perry, *Singapore: Unlikely Power*, 29.

main reason for Singapore's explosive growth was that Singapore traditionally had no connection to the Malay rulers, unlike Malacca. As a result, the role of the Malays in Singapore was small and trade through the Strait of Malacca was not affected by traditional Malay policies. The rise of Singapore brought to the VOC everything they had tried to avoid in recent decades: a free port based on the principles of ancient Malacca and a European competitor in the VOC sphere of influence in the archipelago.⁵³

Pre-modern Singapore

At this point Thomas Stamford Raffles (1781-1826) starts to play an important role in Singapore. When Raffles arrived in Singapore in 1819 the island had a reputation for piracy. In the 14th century it had been a thriving trading center and in the 17th century a small entrepot at the height of the Johor empire. In 1819 however, only a small settlement was ruled by the temenggung of Johor. The temenggung is equivalent to the title Marquess in the English-speaking world. Traditionally the Temenggung had been an important official in the Malay court, but with the end of the Johor empire it was more of a village chief. The population consisted of Chinese who had spice plantations around the area of present downtown Singapore and groups of Orang Laut who were concentrated around the mouths of the rivers.⁵⁴

The choice for Singapore wasn't just made by Raffles, he considered the island to be the most strategic place available in the straits. The honor must be shared with William Farquhar (1774-1839) who would be in charge of Singapore for several years. It was the ideal site for a British port and base, it had a natural harbor, ample timber supplies, fresh drinking water and most importantly it connected the most important trade routes in the world.

The first five years of Singapore's life was as an Anglo-Malay association. The English controlled the port and had permission to establish a factory along the north-shore of the river, with the right to build within the radius of a canon shot of the bank. But even within these limits the English hold was not absolute, the Temenggung still had some power and claimed half the custom duties from the port, a considerable part of the proceeds of the opium, gambling and liquor monopolies. The Temenggung was still recognized as the formal source

⁵³ *Ibidem*, 124-125.

⁵⁴ Baker, *Crossroads*, 82-83.

of law, and on top of this he continued to receive gifts from traders who passed through the Singapore Strait.⁵⁵

The population on the island grew quickly: Indians and English traders from the subcontinent, Chinese from Riau, Malays from the offshore islands and the peninsula and natives from what Indonesia is today made Singapore their new home. They were all attracted by the rise of the rejuvenated port, offering new opportunities for people.⁵⁶ The presence of the English soldiers and sailors offered a level of security on the island and the lawless waters. The English colonial authorities and traders were delighted with this commercial progress and population growth, but not so much with the persisted power of the Temenggung. The most Raffles could manage was to buy off the Temenggung with money. So the Temenggung signed a new agreement in 1823 surrendering his control of the island and adjacent territory, his share of port duties and right to receive gifts from Chinese and native traders. A year later in 1824 the English took care of sovereignty and legality problems in the Strait. The Dutch and English signed the Anglo-Dutch Treaty or Treaty of London. The treaty diffused Anglo-Dutch rivalry by dividing the Malay world between London and Amsterdam. This agreement was a turning point for both parties. After the end of the Napoleonic wars, the major colonial powers decided to stop fighting each other and instead share the exploitations in Asia. The Dutch gave up on their hopes of retaining their dominant position in Asia as a result of the VOC bankruptcy in 1799, but the treaty gave the Dutch undisputed rights to impose sovereignty in the Indonesian archipelago. The English were now the dominant power in the Strait and the rest of the Malay Peninsula. The division of Asia was a win for the Europeans. With the new power in hands Raffles also signed a new treaty with the Temenggung in 1824, the EIC paid the Temenggung even more money in exchange for the formal sovereignty over Singapore and all islands. The Temenggung was left with vaguely defined territories on the mainland. This meant the end of the Anglo-Malay period on the island.⁵⁷

In 1834 the English government ended the tea monopoly. Just like the VOC, the EIC had been granted monopolies on trade in the Far East, for example tea. They could manipulate the price of tea by controlling the amount of tea that was shipped to England. When the monopoly was ended new English competitors entered the market and the amount of supply to England increased. This change brought down the price of tea and increased the amount of

⁵⁵ Michael Barr, *Singapore: A Modern History*. (London 2019) 74.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, 75-76.

tea sold in England. Singapore benefited directly from this change through an increase in traffic through the port and its role as an entrepot.⁵⁸ As a result of the opium wars of 1839-1842 Chinese ports opened up for foreign trade other than opium which benefited the English. In combination with these unequal treaties Singapore also benefited. These treaties increased the level of trade through Singapore, the trade enhanced the importance of Singapore as a naval base and resupply center for the English royal navy, whose presence has been enhanced to protect the increased volume of trade and shipping. The opening of the Chinese ports led to more trade but also to more access to the Chinese markets and their products from the archipelago. Other contributing developments to Singapore's growth as an international port were the standardization of the use of the steamship and the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869. The opening of the Suez Canal revolutionized the trade between Europe and Asia, time of movement between ports was reduced heavily. This speed, in combination with the enhanced capacity of the steamships, lowered cost of trade significantly and increased the volume of the trade. Drop in cost meant increased profit for the merchants but also less expensive goods for costumers.⁵⁹

Towards Independence

In the 19th century Singapore experienced a lot of growth, both in trade as in economic importance. At the same time, it faced some serious social and administrative problems. Because the EIC was not interested in social conditions for the people in Singapore. The different communities in Singapore demanded reforms to prevent control by lawless elements. As long as Singapore was run by the EIC hope for change was little. When the EIC was abolished in 1858 Singapore was no longer under the rule of the EIC but shifted to the British Indian rule of Calcutta which didn't change much. The merchant community in Singapore lobbied in London for change of this situation. They wanted the English strait settlements to be a separate colony. In 1867 this wish became real; the English government established the crown colony with its own administration and government based in Singapore.⁶⁰ Becoming this separate colony meant the creation of civil service for the strait settlements. The civil service could be trained to deal with conditions in the territories. Another change after the establishment of the crown colony was the founding of a Singapore legislative council as a

⁵⁸ Baker, *Crossroads*, 91.

⁵⁹ *Ibidem*, 92.

⁶⁰ *Ibidem*, 103.

law-making body. Although the council was not elected, the members could raise issues and propose legislation reflecting the concerns of the people of Singapore.⁶¹ During the 20th century half of the council consisted of colonial administrators and the other half were Asians who represented the Straits Chinese and commercial interest and members of the British business community. The governor of Singapore still held veto power over the council and represented the interested of the English government. The council did however represent an important step forward in Singapore's political development.⁶²

When Singapore entered the 20th century It could be best described as a transient society. Few Europeans/English settled in Singapore, those who ran the government or trade were only temporary residents of Singapore. Within the Asian community, most people also viewed their residence as temporary. This feeling within both groups meant that only a quarter of the population saw Singapore as their home.⁶³

Singapore at the beginning of the 20th century was the most important trading place in Southeast Asia and the seventh largest port in the world. The production of raw materials in the region grew and with that Singapore had a great advantage: its geographical location, in combination with well-developed infrastructure to help the expansion of trade and commerce. To grow financial and commercial services were required. Luckily the island was able to provide those services. The need for banking facilities and credit in Malaya helped Singapore's financial community to grow significantly. The funds to expand production, buy machinery and finance trade brought increased profits to already established banks and attracted new banks from Europe and the US. Also, the need to ensure cargo to and from the area resulted in the establishment of an insurance market as well. These developments put Singapore on the map as an important financial center and thriving port city.⁶⁴ Singapore's economic prosperity was complimented not only by location but also by its ability to offer good infrastructure for trade. There were improvements like the expansion of the harbor and dock facilities, the opening of the causeway that linked Singapore to the peninsula for rail traffic, the building of new roads and reservoirs and the opening of the Kallang air and sea plane terminal in 1937.⁶⁵

⁶¹ Baker, *Crossroads*, 104.

⁶² *Ibidem*.

⁶³ *Ibidem*, 108.

⁶⁴ *Ibidem*, 193.

⁶⁵ *Ibidem*, 200-201.

After many years of prosperity, the successful Japanese invasion of Singapore and British Malaya in 1941 and the following three and a half years of occupation changed a lot and can be seen as a turning point in its history. The defeat of the British empire and the suffering of the Malay people during the occupation meant the end of colonialism in British Malaya. The Japanese conquest of Southeast Asia took only ten weeks. At rapid speed the Japanese defeated the 130.000 English troops. England had invested heavily in their defense of the region and the public believed they had established an impregnable bastion. No one understood how they were defeated so quickly. What happened was that all soldiers were ill-equipped with artillery (tanks and anti-tank capabilities) and outdated airplanes. Additionally, many of these soldiers were poorly motivated Indian troops and inexperienced Australian troops.⁶⁶ But more important the Japanese won because they were well equipped, well trained, motivated and well-led. One of Japan's biggest advantages was its air force and control of the air with whom they quickly dispatched the units of the British Royal Air Force. When the British battleships were also destroyed, the Japanese had control over the air and sea and so they were victorious. Although the British empire was in decline since World War I, they were not so in the eyes of the Asian people. And the fall of Singapore, by the hand of an Asian power, made the European invincibility disappear.

How the different groups of people experienced the occupation varied between race, willingness to co-operate with the Japanese and luck. The Chinese in Malaya and Singapore were subjected to horrific scenes. Two days after the Japanese arrival they launched a systematic massacre of Chinese men between 18 and 50 years old. This was targeted at local Chinese who had collaborated with the British or supported the resistance in China. With deaths between 25000 and 50000 this was a clear massacre of civilians. The survivors and Chinese women and children lived under constant fear and as a whole the Chinese community suffered immensely. The European community were put in concentration camps, soldiers were incarcerated and later shipped to force labor camps in Japan, Taiwan or Thailand, if they hadn't already died of starvation or other cruelties. The Malayan civilians met the same fate as they were transferred to a compound in Sime Road, where many died of hunger and disease.⁶⁷

When the British returned in 1945, they were welcomed with joy, the period of fear was over and there seemed hope for the future. Although the people of Malaya and Singapore

⁶⁶ Baker, *Crossroads*, 218.

⁶⁷ Barr, *Singapore: A Modern History*, 98.

were glad to see the British return, the British had lost their moral authority to rule.⁶⁸ The Japanese occupation had ended the perception of British invincibility and superiority. The war had changed the views of the different groups in Malaya on what the new political order should be. For Singapore the occupation had contributed to the establishment of a Singaporean identity, the Chinese community had stabilized during the 1930's to a point where most of the group were born on the island and felt connected to it. The majority of this group viewed the occupation as a common experience. This shared experience became a building block for nationalism. The British had failed them and according to them they were no longer welcome in Asia. They wanted to dictate their own future.

The anti-colonial struggle for Singapore was unique in comparison to countries like Indonesia or Vietnam. In those countries the indigenous people reclaimed their nation from the European influence. But for the Singaporeans most of the population had just recently made it their home. For a long time, Singapore had been the center of the strait settlements and British Malay. This changed however when the British, during the 1948 federation of Malaya, decided to exclude Singapore from the peninsula. Singapore was to remain a British colony and the Malayan administrative center shifted to Kuala Lumpur. Because of Singapore's economic and strategic importance to post war British aims in Asia, its future was weighted carefully. Its port was to help rebuild Britain's role in international trade that had been shattered by the war. Also, Singapore's military importance became more prominent in the post war era, because of the Cold War and the confrontation against communism.

For the following years most Singaporean politicians tried to find a future for Singapore as part of Malaya. They weren't sure what kind of political future they wanted, but they could agree that they didn't want outsiders to tell them how to run their society and life anymore. The population of Singapore had increased significantly, between 1930 and the end of the war the population had doubled. Now over one million people lived in Singapore and this number was still growing. Not so much from immigration anymore but from families having children and settling.⁶⁹

The political developments in Singapore went through a number of stages from 1945 towards 1965. From 1945 to 1948 the political discourse was dominated by radical Singaporean leftists and communists who had their education in English schools. They had ties with all the different ethnic groups in Singapore. These men founded the first broad based political party of Singapore, the Malayan Democratic Union or MDU. One of their spearheads

⁶⁸ Baker, *Crossroads*, 227.

⁶⁹ Baker, *Crossroads*, 254-255.

was the inclusion of Singapore in the federation of Malaya. Their aim was to end British rule in Singapore and Malaya. Unfortunately, after the British declared a state of emergency because of an armed revolt in Malaya by the MCP (Malayan communist party), the non-communist members of the MDU no longer wanted to be associated with the party. In 1948 the MDU voluntarily disbanded and right-wing parties began dominating Singapore's politics.⁷⁰ The Singapore progressive party (SSP) filled the vacuum left by the disappearance of the MDU. They wanted slow movement to self-rule until the population was more literate and political experienced. In 1953 however political unrest arose as the Chinese speaking community began to raise their voice. This group was the sleeping giant of Singapore because 75 percent of the population was Chinese. They were well educated and communicated with each other in Chinese. As Singapore became more democratic, the Chinese community could easily determine its future because of their great numbers. Because of this, between 1954 and 1959, the left political spectrum renewed as a result of political scramble for support of the Chinese speaking community. In 1959 the People's Action Party (PAP) made a convincing victory. The leader of the party, Lee Kuan Yew, became the first Prime Minister of Singapore. Lee pushed a campaign to merge Singapore with Malaya. However, this merge turned out to be a disaster from the beginning. Therefore in 1965 a departure of Singapore from Malaysia was arranged. Singapore faced the world as an independent republic.⁷¹

Conclusion

The establishment of Singapore is due to geopolitical factors, as described in this chapter. When international trading posts emerged in South East Asia the fifteenth century, the state of Malacca became the leading warehouse in the region. Malacca gained its position due to multiple factors, many of them geopolitical. Recognition and protection from the Chinese emperor meant Malacca could generate enough power to hold its own among its neighboring competitors. The strategic location in the narrowest part of the Strait of Malacca, combined with the seasonal monsoon made Malacca a place where traders from all over the world came together. By being included in Chinese trade missions, Malacca secured its position as a warehouse and thus experienced economic growth as early as 1400. By forming different alliances, in addition to the Chinese protectorate, the balance of power in the region shifted in

⁷⁰ Baker, *Crossroads*, 258.

⁷¹ Barr, *Singapore: A Modern History*, 118.

favor of Malacca. Malacca held economic and strategic hegemony over the Peninsula and the East Coast of Sumatra until 1511.

During this period of prosperity for Malacca, Singapore was unimportant. After 1511, the European powers arrived in Southeast Asia and the Portuguese conquered Malacca. The role of Malacca hardly changed but power in the region shifts to the Europeans. In 1641 the Dutch managed to dominate the region and conquer Malacca, at that time there seemed to be no place for yet another European power.

The English had been active in the region for a long time but could not compete against the VOC. Renewed interest in the 19th century following a huge demand for tea and tin made the English search for a permanent post. They needed a place to collect trade products like tin and tea.

The English looked for islands when expanding their empire since islands could easier be protected by ships and didn't need large armies. It also had to be a place that could function as naval base to protect the trade. Raffles dropped his eye on Singapore.

With the rise of Singapore Malacca declined. Singapore grew fast and benefited from the opium wars, opening of China and revolutionizing trade. In the 20th century Singapore was the most important trading place in Southeast Asia and the seventh largest port in the world. Its geographical location, in combination with well-developed infrastructure helped expansion of trade and commerce.

After years of prosperity, the Japanese invasion of Singapore and British Malaya in 1941 and the following three and a half years of occupation changed a lot and can be seen as a turning point in its history. The Japanese occupation had ended the perception of British invincibility and superiority. The war had changed the views of the different groups in Malaya on what the new political order should be. For Singapore the occupation had contributed to the establishment of a Singaporean identity. The majority of this group viewed the occupation as a common experience. This shared experience became a building block for nationalism.

After the war Singapore tried to find a future for themselves. The political developments in Singapore went through a number of stages from 1945 towards 1965. Without these four factors, namely its strategic location, its trading activities in the region, technological developments and protections by larger powers, Singapore would probably never have developed into its current state.

Domestic policies of Modern Singapore

To establish if geopolitical factors had any influence on the policies of Singapore, I studied the domestic policies of Singapore after 1965. In this chapter I will elaborate on the economic and governance policies of Singapore. By looking at domestic policy, it is possible to examine the impact of geopolitical factors on policy.

One of the most influential people for the growth and direction of modern Singapore since 1965 is Lee Kuan Yew. Since his contribution has been essential for the emergence of modern Singapore, this chapter begins with a paragraph on his contributions.

Lee Kuan Yew

For the history of Modern Singapore one man has been of exceptional influence for both domestic and foreign policy. This man was Lee Kuan Yew. Perry states in his work on the history of Singapore that Raffles may be the founder of Singapore, Lee was the man who transformed Singapore. He took Singapore “from the third world to the first world”.⁷²

Lee was born September 16, 1923 in Singapore. Lee spent four years of his life studying in Britain at the London school of economics and at Cambridge studying law. He studied the classical works of the British political tradition and nurtured his debating skills which he would use back in Singapore first as a lawyer and later in politics. Lee would later be called “the finest Englishman east of Suez”. Lee however never forgot his Chinese background; this would emerge strongly in his later career.⁷³ Lee made political success with his communication skills and build a strong institutional and organizational network. His speechmaking ability was sophisticated and during his heyday as a politician Lee gave passionate speeches with ease. In addition to his speaking skills, he was very concerned about writing skills in general and wanted his government to write simple and clear memoranda to easily involve the people.

In 1965 after the separation from Malaysia Lee wanted to make Singapore attractive to outside investors, by keeping the small state tidy. The greening of Singapore was one of Lee’s most effective projects, by impressing visitors (especially foreign businessmen) with color and cleanliness to persuade them to invest their money. This greening was not just a matter of

⁷² Perry, *Singapore: Unlikely Power*, 189.

⁷³ *Ibidem*, 192.

only aesthetic appeal, this gardening offered an illusion of control. Lee knew that foreign investors wanted political stability before they would invest their money. Within Singapore's colonial history Lee found an accessible and usable past that could support such an image for Singapore. Lee did not use the past to criticize the present, instead of denouncing the colonial past he glorified it and made it a positive part of his Singaporean story. He elaborated on the way the British had provided a safe haven for his Chinese ancestors. Without the secure environment in Singapore, they would not have found the new and prosperous life they did.⁷⁴ Lee used assets of a selective past to embrace the British founder and colonialism for the links to a wider world, social stability, rule of law and the commitment to progress that legacy carried. Just like Raffles, Lee embodied free trade in combination with authoritarian rule and used history to establish a narrative of a new entity.

Under Lee's control modern infrastructure became more important. Roads, telecommunication, airport and attractive mass housing were all part of his modern plan. Before World War I Singapore found a great challenge in creating good public housing and getting rid of the slums that were an eyesore for the government. When Lee rose to power, he further reshaped the community, geographically and socially, by acquiring land, demolishing slums and initiating resettlement. This meant rebuilding the core of an entire city and changing the lives of the people living in it. People were expelled from their houses downtown to create space for large business centers. Lee's government gave priority to the poor people, detaching them from the overcrowded residences and semi-rural kampongs (traditional villages and enclosed neighborhoods within the city) into carefully maintained and well-built flats, establishing self-contained communities with shops and schools. New public transport linked all these towns together.⁷⁵ In a speech given to the national day rally in 1986 Lee states that:

*"I am often accused of interfering in the private lives of citizens. Yes, if I did not, had I not done that, we wouldn't be here today. We would not have made economic progress, if we had not intervened on very personal matters - who your neighbor is, how you live, the noise you make, how you spit, or what language you use. We decide what is right."*⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Perry, *Singapore: Unlikely Power*, 193-194.

⁷⁵ *Ibidem*, 196.

⁷⁶ Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew's eve of national day broadcast 1986.

<https://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/speeches/record-details/73c2adea-115d-11e3-83d5-0050568939ad>

These policies came not from popular consensus but from within the government. Strict and specific rules governed the behavior of the citizens. With this ordered world Lee cultivated the image of an ordered society.

Perry compares Lee on small scale to Ataturk or Peter the Great, yet Lee had no interest in a personality cult. He had no desire for statues or his face on coins. Lee had no sense of grandeur either for himself or for his country. He always dressed simply in a tieless white shirt. Never reluctant to offer advice, but his sense of mission did not extend beyond Singapore.

After ruling for more than thirty years in 1990 Lee became senior minister and ultimately minister mentor to the Singaporean government until his resignation in 2011.⁷⁷

Lee's influence over Singapore's national identity and approach to public policy can't be understated. Under the guidance of Lee, Singapore became one of Asia's so-called tiger economies, along with Hong Kong, South Korea, and Taiwan. But what separates Singapore from these other tigers is that Singapore, while retaining state control of core economic development, did not employ protectionist policies to help nurture its own domestic industrial giants. Lee's Singapore pursued an economic development model that prioritized courting foreign direct investment, particularly from U.S. multinational corporations looking for low-wage labor.⁷⁸

Governance

After Singapore's separation from Malaysia the city faced the world as a sovereign state, but the challenges facing the country were complex and serious. It had little industry and exports, a diverse and young population with high unemployment rate, no assurance of military or diplomatic stability and it was not clear if anyone would acknowledge the new republic. But there were still some factors beneficial to the survival of Singapore in this new situation. In 1921 Britain had built a huge naval base in the city which provided jobs and income for almost one-fifth of the working population. Singapore had a functioning administrative and judicial office, an excellent harbor, educated elite and with their location at the most southern

⁷⁷ Ankit. 'Singapore: A Small Asian Heavyweight' <https://www.cfr.org/background/Singapore-small-asian-heavyweight>.

⁷⁸ Ibidem.

end of the Strait a gateway between the Indian and Pacific Ocean.⁷⁹ These strong points were sufficient enough to provide a good base from which Singapore could move on. But without some luck, ruthlessness and skill in governance the future of Singapore could have developed quite different. Lee was successful in finding international support for Singapore because of the conservation of socialist credentials in his governments. Despite their drift from these socialist roots, as they started out as anti-colonial leftist, they kept the semblance of this political profile. This helped as they visited the third world and non-aligned states when seeking for acknowledgement of Singapore. Also, countries like the UK with their labour government and the conservative governments in Australia and New Zealand were willing to support the new country at the time Singapore needed it.

In these early years of independence, the government also imposed a very successful economic revolution. At the base stood Goh Keng Swee's 'bulldoze and build' model. Goh was the Minister of Finance in the first government of Lee. The model focused on export-oriented industrialization. Most of the buildings in the Jurong region and on the smaller islands were bulldozed and the land was flattened to make room for multinational companies and their factories.⁸⁰ Within this model of Goh, we see the ruthlessness the government used in their strategy. This devotion to the expansion and growth of the young country was according to Lee not necessarily about prosperity or economic development, it was about survival of the nation. Everyone needed to stand behind the government for this survival to be successful.

*"We must build up the economy, build up the sense of national consciousness, solidarity and understanding that survival cannot be sought individually; cannot be sought for by looking for individual escape routes."*⁸¹

Goh Chock Tong became Prime Minister in 1990. He brought a different style of leadership. He appeared to be a greater advocate of openness and freedom; the government took a more consultative feel.⁸² The public expected him to be a caretaker until it was time for Lee Kuan Yew's son Lee Hsien Loong to take over. This expected scenario was changed very quick when Lee Hsien Loong was diagnosed with cancer. Goh ended up being the Prime Minister for 13 years. Only after 1996 when Lee Hsien Loong was cleared of cancer, he could resume

⁷⁹ Barr, *Singapore: A Modern History* 127.

⁸⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁸¹ Transcript of speech made by the Prime Minister, Mr. Lee Kuan Yew, at the kampong glam branch of the pap on 2nd January 1966. <https://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/speeches/record-details/73a3d2ed-115d-11e3-83d5-0050568939ad>.

⁸² Baker, *Crossroads*, 415.

his route towards the position of Prime Minister.⁸³ With the heritage of Lee Kuan Yew, Goh made an effort to break down the ethnic segmentation that Lee caused with his political program. Goh also provided space for airing of non-government views in the public and made efforts lay more emphasis on creative thinking in schools.⁸⁴ A big part of his time as Prime Minister he devoted to developing Singapore's ties with India, the Middle East and other parts of the world that had not been a major focus to Singapore in that time.⁸⁵

In 2004 Lee Hsien Loong finally became Prime Minister after being deputy prime minister with no portfolio under Goh for 14 years. Perhaps because of this he remained in his father shadow for quite a long time. It wasn't helpful that Lee Kuan Yew was kept in the cabinet as Minister mentor and that this decision was taken by Lee Kuan Yew himself. The decline in votes the PAP received during the first general elections in 2006 were also not beneficial to Lee Hsien Loong's start as Prime Minister. It would take until 2011 before Lee Hsien Loong was able to establish his own authority. The rate of votes the PAP received in 2011 was still declining and the government was suffering from some political and administrative failures, like political unstable levels of immigration, rising cost of living, health care and housing and inadequate supply of housing and transport infrastructure.⁸⁶ The PAP received its lowest votes since Singapore's independence, just 60 percent of all votes. Despite these bad election results Lee Hsien Loong was able to turn the tide. He apologized for the pursued policies and the administrative errors and promised to do better. Then after the election he forced the retirement of under performing ministers as well as the retirement of his father from the governmental stage. This proved a turning point for the party and a base from which the PAP was able to regain trust in the 2015 election. The result was positive as Lee Hsien Loong brought the votes for the PAP back to 70 percent.

The apology of Lee can be considered as a new start in Singapore's way of governing. Since the 1980's the ruling elite had been justifying its monopoly of power in Singapore by pointing out its performance as a government all these years. But this power and performance came to an end in 2012. The self-proclaimed brilliance of the elite, the national obsession with collecting international appreciation and the drive to share wisdom and experience of the

⁸³ Michael Barr, *The Ruling Elite of Singapore: Networks of Power and Influence*. (London 2014), 62.

⁸⁴ *Ibidem* 64.

⁸⁵ Barr, *Singapore: A Modern History*, 138.

⁸⁶ *Ibidem*.

elite with the world backfired. Expressions of humility and hints of self-doubt on the part of the ruling elite appeared to be the solution.⁸⁷

The return votes the government received in 2015 suggest that the PAP succeeded in creating more realistic expectations among the people. Gerry Rodan suggests in his article about the new challenges for the ruling party, that even these more manageable expectations could be unsustainable without a more drastic and fundamental adjustment to the nation's political economy.⁸⁸ He says that the political problems the government face rest fundamentally on contradictions that are inherent in Singapore's model of capitalism. This reliance is the outcome of Singapore's ongoing subordinate role in the international production chain and its embrace of the neo-liberal international order. Its debilitating effects include the declining of local incomes, income inequalities getting bigger and the disempowerment of local authorities. These are all issues that aggravate the governments political challenges in 2011.

The solution of the problems with housing and transport infrastructure also played a role in the PAP's recovery in the election of 2015. But the most notable action was the introduction of social welfare measures alongside significant reduction in the inflow of foreign workers. In other words, the retreat from neo-liberal accommodation of international capital. However, the details of these measures raise doubts about their long-term viability, because most of these welfare measures have clauses and the reduction of inflow of foreign labor is both slowing the economy and drawing complaints from capital investors. Rodan states that challenges between the politics and the economics are ultimately irreconcilable.⁸⁹ Time will have to tell if these challenges are to be overcome by the Singapore government.

Economy

Much of the economic success of modern Singapore involved the successful exploitation of its location. To appreciate this, it is necessary to know the historical background, this has already been mentioned in earlier chapters. In this paragraph I want to present a short focus on the economic history and then follow up with the economic policy after 1965.

⁸⁷ Michael Barr, "Ordinary Singapore: The Decline of Singapore Exceptionalism." *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 46, no. 1 (2016): 1-17.

⁸⁸ Gerry Rodan, "Capitalism, Inequality and Ideology in Singapore: New Challenges for the Ruling Party." *Asian Studies Review* 40, no. 2 (2016): 211.

⁸⁹ *Ibidem*, 225.

With the decision of Raffles to set up a EIC factory, the establishment of a British free port under British protection helped kickstart the Singaporean economy. Before this time Malacca was the regional hub and entrepot in the Strait of Malacca connecting trade and commerce within Asia and between Europe and Asia. European influence had great effect on the region but with the downfall of the VOC and the upcoming EIC Singapore took over the role of entrepot. When the EIC set up a factory Chinese migrants and natives from the region began traveling to the island to trade and relocate. The mixture of European, Chinese and indigenous people provided products and ideas to Singapore in the 19th century and contributed to the development of Singapore as a new trade center.⁹⁰

By the last quarter of the 19th century Singapore's fortunes became intertwined with the fortunes of the Malay peninsula. This was the consequence of the British integrating the peninsula into their sphere of influence following the Treaty of London in 1824. This in combination with the increase in the use of the steam ship from 1846 onwards and the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 solidified Singapore into the 20th century. Shipping to Europe became quicker. Heavier and larger amount of goods could be transported profitably. In addition, the steam ships burnt coal and needed a harbor to refuel which Singapore could offer. The rise of global demand for goods from Southeast Asia like tin and rubber generated an economic boom for Singapore and Malaya. The production, storage and trade of tin and rubber became the staple of the Singapore economy. Tin had always been a popular trading product in Southeast Asia but with these technological changes and easy access to European markets the tin trade became a major industry. Rubber and tin were produced in Malaya but exported through Singapore. Tin mines used to be only small-scale and low capital operations relying on Chinese labor. The mining of tin became dominated by European companies and more capital intensive by the end of the century. Rubber was in its essence a large scale and capital-intensive operation that relied on Indian labor. Both industries turned to Singapore to distribute their output from Malaya, making Singapore a regional hub for rubber and tin sales. Singapore had no tin mines or rubber plantations during this period, but Malaya and other production centers used the island as their passage to global markets, conforming the interdependence of Singapore and the region.⁹¹ By 1930 the demand for goods from the region wasn't just European but global. The disruption created by World War I caused an opening for the US and Japan to expand trade relations with Singapore and Malaya. The US and Japan were rising economies. In particular the US, who became the largest economy in

⁹⁰ Barr, *Singapore: A Modern History*, 144.

⁹¹ *Ibidem*, 149-150.

the world in the 1930s. Also, they were both geographical a lot closer to Singapore than Europe. In the years leading up to World War II the share of export of Malayan products to the US doubled and export to Japan tripled.

The only product of the colonial staples that is still important to Singapore nowadays is oil, making Singapore the fourth largest oil exporter in the world, exporting 43 billion dollars' worth of oil mainly to Malaysia, China, Hongkong and Australia.⁹² Its association with oil started in 1892 when Samuel and Co. (later Shell transport and trading Co.), a London based company who established a storage for Russian kerosine on Pulau Bukum. This is an island just 5km out of Singapore's shore. The Dutch and English possessed huge oil reserves in Sumatra and Borneo, so when the English started production in 1897 Pulau Bukum became their storehouse. When the Dutch and English companies merged into Royal Dutch Shell Pulau became the place for storage and distribution of all their oil and Singapore became the headquarters. Singapore and Pulau had geographical advantages, a modern city, good harbor and entrée to global markets via the British network as everyone was turning to oil to fuel transport on sea and land.⁹³ In addition, the oil companies also brought their technical expertise and personnel to Singapore. With this a pattern developed whereby foreign technical and managerial expertise was added to Singapore's foreign capital. This development was a consequence of the encouragement of foreign direct investment. The Singaporean government also carefully targeted industries that had to relocate their experts to Singapore in order to do business. The government hoped to learn from these companies and at the same time establish Singapore as a hub for foreign talent.

From 1860 until 1960 Singapore could be defined as a staple port. A staple port is a designated port within a system where the government required that all overseas trade in a certain product were to be transacted at this specific location.⁹⁴ Location is the most important element of a successful staple port, but other factors also played a role. Economic considerations gave the great staple ports their distinguishing characteristics. There are five other characteristics: The first is performance of entrepreneurial, investment, management and mercantile functions connected with production of the staple. Followed by the provision of financial services, the processing of the staple commodity, marketing services including the role of the port as the region's main market for the staple and finally the close involvement of

⁹² The Observatory of Economic Complexity. <https://oec.world/en/profile/bilateral-product/refined-petroleum/reporter/sgp>

⁹³ Barr, Singapore: *A Modern History*, 151.

⁹⁴ *Ibidem*.

business interests in the port with hinterland production.⁹⁵ Singapore and the Malayan hinterland possessed all these characteristics during 1860 until 1960. Because of the British overlordship, British and Asian investors and capital and Chinese workers. However, Singapore's economic future wasn't really a staple port but rather a place for manufacturing and service. The reason for this lies in the politics of the 1950s, when the merger of Singapore and Malaysia failed. This led to such ill will between the two countries that, after the separation, Singapore lost the Malaysian market.⁹⁶

With Malaysia's market lost the government of Singapore had one viable economic option left: manufacturing for export. This plan worked, unemployment during the 1960 was around 9 percent but by 1970 this was turned into a labor shortages problem. Mainly because the government build the new manufacturing sector which involved a lot of waged labor. This proved to be the primary economic strategy of the PAP. The economic agenda was led by the minister of Finance Goh Keng Sween. He was advised by Hon Sui Sen (who would later become minister of finance) and dr. Albert Winsemius. Winsemius was a Dutch economist who went on behalf of the United Nations development program to Singapore in 1960. He continued to be an advisor until 1984 and is given credit for many of Singapore's economic achievements.⁹⁷

The main challenge for Singapore was creating capital for public and private investment. Goh tried to accomplish this but unfortunately his effort did not help to achieve job-creating investments in manufacturing. Therefore, private investment was needed. The government decided to do everything possible to get multinationals to move their manufacturing operations to Singapore. This search for private capital took Singapore to the same countries they already knew from the first half of the 20th century: Europe, the US and Japan. The US was the most important partner for Singapore. The US was a land of mass consuming and mass production and an important player in the post war era. Singapore had established itself as one of the Asian friends, building on the contacts Lee Kuan Yew had in the US. Singapore proposed business plans and promised a lot. (mainly cheap labor, modern factories, modern port and extensive tax holidays).⁹⁸

The Singaporean government created a development model in which the capital in Singapore and the international capital worked together to turn the city state into a key

⁹⁵ Gregg Huff, *Economic Growth of Singapore* (Cambridge 2009), 16.

⁹⁶ Barr, *Singapore: A Modern History*, 154.

⁹⁷ *Ibidem*, 155.

⁹⁸ *Ibidem*, 156.

junction in the international production cycle. This cycle was then based and financed in cities like Amsterdam, London, New York and Tokyo. The strategy Singapore applied focused on manufacturing parts of complicated products such as computers or other electronic devices. Alongside this part of the economic strategy Singapore's oil and ship repair industry can be considered a different dimension of the same transnational strategy. This economic model of Singapore was a success because of a few factors that Singapore possessed. Singapore was easily accessible for centers in the US, Europe and Asia. They had access to raw materials nearby. They provided the use of fast and reliable sea transport for these manufactured goods to the markets. Good infrastructure and port facilities were available in Singapore. Finally reliable and cheap Singaporean labor force with enough knowledge of producing products to make/deliver the demanding goods were available. That, in combination with a stable political system, minimized the risk for investors. Nevertheless, luck also played a role in the economic progress of Singapore. The Vietnam war provided an economic boom and turned Lee Kuan Yew's American liaison in 1968 into an immediate profitable position. In the long term this connection made Singapore a part of the American plans for Asia. Singapore's development strategy would also have worked without the Vietnam war, but would not have succeeded so quickly. The ship and oil industries were the big winners, establishing themselves in Southeast Asia generated by the boom created by the Vietnamese war.⁹⁹

Singapore made some great economic developments in recent years. But there are still two basic challenges facing Singapore's economic growth, being increasing productivity and overcoming the limitations of Singapore's land size.

Productivity is the measure of the value created by a worker set in a measured time. An example is when a farmer is working on his land and putting seeds in the ground one by one contributing a certain value to the economy. If the farmer decides to use a machine for planting the seeds, this innovation will increase the productivity of its crops dramatically. Productivity is not simply a matter of mechanizing or upscaling, but there is a limit to the increase in productivity. You can't influence or speed everything up. Singapore does have a problem further increasing its level of productivity. The Singapore workforce is now no more productive than it was in 1974. Now there are just more workers who are utilizing capital equipment of higher value.¹⁰⁰

The efforts from the government to overcome the limitations that occur because of Singapore's size have been more successful. Examples of successful operations are land

⁹⁹ Barr, *Singapore: A Modern History*, 162.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibidem*, 163.

expansions called: “growing a second wing”. By using outward foreign direct investment Singapore is able to invest in neighboring countries and binding them to the city state, so they can expand their own size.¹⁰¹

Conclusion

As first Prime Minister of independent Singapore Lee Kuan Yew lifted Singapore from a third world country to a modern society. He achieved this through a well-thought-out domestic policy. Lee wanted to attract foreign investors by creating an image of control and stability. Lee used the colonial past as a positive part of the history of Singapore. He reshaped the community, geographically and socially, by acquiring land, demolishing slums and initiating resettlement. This meant rebuilding the core of an entire city and changing the lives of the people living in it. These policies did not come from popular consensus but from within the government. Strict and specific rules governed the behavior of the citizens. With this ordered world Lee cultivated the image of an ordered society.

The government faced complex problems after the separation of Malaysia. To solve these problems, Lee emphasized in speeches that the survival of Singapore was the number one priority, the country could only achieve this if everyone listened and worked together. The ruthlessness the government used can be seen in their strategy. According to Lee this devotion to the expansion and growth of the young country was not necessarily about prosperity or economic development, it was about survival of the nation.

Fortunately, Singapore also had a number of factors that it could benefit from. Singapore had a functioning administrative and judicial office, an excellent harbor, an educated elite and located at the most southern end of the Strait it was a natural gateway between the Indian and Pacific Ocean.

After Lee, Goh Chock Tong becomes Prime Minister in 1990. He provided space for airing of non-government views in the public and made efforts with more emphasis on creative thinking in schools. In 2004 the Son of Lee Kuan Yew, Lee Hsien Loong rose to power. However, he was unable to emerge from the shadow of his father in the early years of his term, because his father still held an administrative role. It was only after 2011 that he managed to establish his own authority. However, the results of the PAP during the election

¹⁰¹ Gavin Peebles and Wilson Peter, *Economic Growth and Development in Singapore: Past and Future*. (Cheltenham 2002), 190.

of 2011 were disappointing. The government was suffering from some political and administrative failures. Lee was able to turn the tide, he apologized for the pursued policies and the administrative errors and promised to do better. After the 2015 election the PAP regained trust of the people.

The apology of Lee can be considered as a new start in Singapore's way of governing. Since the 1980's the ruling elite had been justifying its monopoly of power in Singapore by pointing out its performance as a government all these years. But this power and performance came to an end in 2012. Expressions of humility and hints of self-doubt on the part of the ruling elite appeared to be the solution.

However, according to Rodan, even these more manageable expectations could be unsustainable without a more drastic and fundamental adjustment to the nation's political economy. The political problems the government faced rested fundamentally on contradictions that are inherent in Singapore's model of capitalism. Challenges between the politics and the economics are ultimately irreconcilable. Time will have to tell if these challenges are to be overcome by the Singapore government.

The domestic economic policies of Singapore involved the successful exploitation of its location. The historical background shows that the establishment of a British free port under British protection helped kickstart the Singaporean economy. Migration of Chinese traders to Singapore was a result of this growth. The rise of global demand for goods from Southeast Asia like tin and rubber generated an economic boom for Singapore and Malaya. They became the staple of the Singapore economy. Because of Singapore's geographical advantages, modern city, good harbor and entrée to global markets via the British network the oil trade could also prosper. Nowadays oil is the only product of the colonial staples that is still important. From 1860 until 1960 Singapore could be defined as a staple port. Economic considerations gave the staple ports their characteristics and Singapore possessed all of these. However, Singapore's economic future wasn't being a staple port but rather a place for manufacturing and service.

The Singaporean government created a development model in which the capital in Singapore and the international capital worked together to turn the city state into a key junction in the international production cycle. Singapore focused on manufacturing parts of complicated products such as computers or other electronic devices. Singapore's oil and ship repair industry can be considered a different dimension of the same transnational strategy.

However, there are still two basic challenges facing Singapore's economic growth. Singapore faces limits on its productivity and limits on their land size. The degree of success in solving these problems differs.

The impact of geopolitical factors on Singapore's domestic policy is evident. Lee's strict policy of redesigning Singapore stems from geopolitical thinking. Lee saw Singapore's weaknesses like the lack of space, and he saw the need to create a rosy picture to attract foreign investors. According to Lee, in order to have a right to exist as a new small country, the inhabitants must put the national interest before individual interest.

Singapore's economic growth is inextricably linked to geopolitical developments and long-term processes. The ability to adapt economic policies to conditions such as lack of raw materials, space and local sales market force Singapore to make choices based on these geopolitical factors.

Foreign policies of Modern Singapore

Introduction

The third chapter of this thesis will examine Singapore's foreign policy, in particular the policy towards the US and China. And how geopolitical factors are influencing Singapore's foreign policy towards these powers. Before 1965 Lee Kuan Yew was already considering a foreign policy plan for Singapore. The policy towards the United States and China are constituted by security considerations, economic liberalism and pragmatism. Lee aims to be Neutral towards the major powers and wants to stay free from alliances. For defense of the country Singapore wants the US to be involved in the Asia Pacific region to balance regional power. For economic foreign ties access to the large American market has been crucial to Singapore's economic growth. In recent years the share in American trade has declined as trade with countries in Asia, particularly China grew.¹⁰²

At all-time Singapore avoids band wagoning. Singapore pursues its grand desire to remain uniquely Singaporean.¹⁰³

Early years of foreign policy

The foreign policy of Lee was shaped by Singapore's location and unique situation as an island state with no hinterland. His thoughts were formed against a background of rising Cold War tension between an expanding communist bloc and an anti-communist west. With the nations of the non-aligned movement caught in-between.¹⁰⁴ Many scholars focus on Lee's domestic policies and governance. His foreign policy isn't very often mentioned although Lee is generally acknowledged as Asia's leading strategic thinker.¹⁰⁵ The fundamentals for Singapore's foreign policy were forged during the early years of Lee's political career from the 1950s until 1975 with the end of the Vietnam war.

Lee may have left his mark on the foreign policy of Singapore during and also after his time as Prime Minister, it was not until 1965 that Lee was allowed to control the defense and foreign relations of Singapore. Until 1963 this still remained under the purview of the British

¹⁰²IMF Direction of Trade Statistics (DOTS). <https://data.imf.org/?sk=9D6028D4-F14A-464C-A2F2-59B2CD424B85&sId=1515619375491>.

¹⁰³ Robyn Vidra, "The Pragmatic 'Little Red Dot': Singapore's US Hedge Against China," in: *The New Geopolitics of Southeast Asia*, ed. Nicholas Kitchen. 67

¹⁰⁴Derek Heng and Syed Aljunied, *Singapore in Global History*. (Amsterdam 2011), 235-236.

¹⁰⁵ Ibidem.

government and until 1965 this was controlled by the federation of Malaysia from Kuala Lumpur. For Lee foreign affairs were of major importance to Singapore. In a speech in 1964 he claims that for Singapore foreign policy is “*a matter of life and death.*”¹⁰⁶ When looking into the history of Singapore and the entrepôts in the strait of Malacca foreign affairs always have been a priority. Because of factors like size and location Singapore’s manner of getting power is very much related to these factors. The speeches show the thoughts of Lee about this matter. In a later speech in 1965 Lee argues that international affairs are as old as mankind:

*“From the first tribes to the modern nations, man may have learned how to use wood and stone and metal and gun powder, and now nuclear power. But the essential quality of man has never altered. You can read the Peloponnesian wars, you can read the Three Kingdoms of the Chinese classics, and there's nothing new which a human situation can devise. The motivations for human behavior have always been there. The manifestations of the motivations whether they are greed, envy, ambition, greatness, generosity, charity, inevitably ends in a conflict of power positions. And how that conflict is resolved depends upon the accident of the individuals in charge of a particular tribe or nation at a given time. But what has changed is the facility with which men can now communicate and transport not only ideas but also man himself and his weapons. Therefore, into a very old situation has been introduced a very alarming possibility which puts the whole problem of international relations now in a very different perspective.”*¹⁰⁷

In the same speech he also states that:

*“No tribe in proximity with another tribe is happy until a state of dominance of one over the other is established. Or until it has tried to establish that dominance, and failed, and it is quite satisfied that it is not possible, whereupon it lives in fear that the other tribe will try and assert dominance over it. And the cavalcade of man will go on. And if it goes on then I say we have reason to rejoice, for then we shall reach for the moon and the stars and the universe.”*¹⁰⁸

He would repeat this statement when talking about power and the role of developing countries in world politics like Singapore. According to Lee countries which had no power would need to find a solution for this in different ways for which he gives three examples:

¹⁰⁶ Speech of Singapore’s Prime Minister, Mr. Lee Kuan Yew, during the debate on cut-motion on the provision for external affairs ministry in the dewan ra’ayat on 16th December 1964.
<https://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/speeches/record-details/72ffd2ac-115d-11e3-83d5-0050568939ad>

¹⁰⁷ Speech by the Prime Minister, Mr. Lee Kuan Yew, on 'the future of Malaysia', to the institute of international affairs at assembly hall, Melbourne, Australia, march, 24, 1965.
<https://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/speeches/record-details/731e5432-115d-11e3-83d5-0050568939ad>

¹⁰⁸ Ibidem.

“There are three ways in which one can be important if one hasn't power in world politics: first, one can be important by being an accretion to the power of somebody else -- which is always a useful thought. We spend a lot of time thinking about it ourselves because being conveniently placed in the middle of Southeast Asia, we sort of calculate our credit-worthiness to those who have got the credit. Second, if you although individually haven't the power, you collectively can create some sensation of power -- like Afro-Asian solidarity once upon a time looked as if it might create that sensation of power. (It is) not the reality of power but the sensation of it. And third, if for diversity of reasons, the big powers decide to contest for supremacy in any particular underdeveloped region.

It is in this third circumstance that Southeast Asia is interesting. It is sad really, for developing nation that the keen contest for the hearts and minds of ignorant black, yellows and browns have lost the same attractions for the Russians and the Americans. I think the disillusionment (lies in the spending) of large sums of hard cash either as aid in food or other forms of assistance like hardware and surplus arms and tanks and other weapons of peace-loving or peace-keeping operations (which) have all come to nought. And I think the first period of disillusionment has worked to the disadvantage of both underdeveloped (and developed) countries throughout the world.”¹⁰⁹

In those early years of Singapore Lee is very much aware of the strengths and weaknesses of his country and the position Singapore has in the world order. His speeches predict the way Lee wants to operate in the future. He talks about foreign investment and the cooperation of Southeast Asian countries to create some sensation of power. He also mentions the way Singapore needs to position itself between the great powers who will contest for supremacy in the region.

After the independence of Singapore in 1965 Lee was finally fully responsible for the foreign relations and defense of Singapore. *“We have, on the one hand, to look after the international relations for our country, and on the other, we have to look after the livelihood of our people.”*¹¹⁰ in other speeches (and interviews) from 1965 Lee elaborates on the logic and fundamentals of the foreign policy of Singapore.

“We are now the arbitors of our foreign and defence policies, and our strategic importance makes our foreign and defence policies a matter of interest not just to our immediate neighbours but to a much larger group of nations whose ideological and power conflicts have gripped the world in a cold war since the end of the Second World War. There have been shifts in the balance of power between the two world blocs, and there have been shifts even within each of the blocs. Singapore, first, must decide where its long-term interests lie. And,

¹⁰⁹ Transcript of speech by the Prime Minister at the foreign correspondents' associations' dinner in Tokyo on 21st march, 1967. <https://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/speeches/record-details/7435d1f0-115d-11e3-83d5-0050568939ad>

¹¹⁰ translations of the Prime Minister's speech in Hokkien at the 1st anniversary celebrations of the upper serangoon community centre on 26th September 1965. <https://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/speeches/record-details/740c12c0-115d-11e3-83d5-0050568939ad>

within that context, a foreign policy must be designed to bring us the surest guarantee of our survival and our prosperity."¹¹¹

For Lee the most important matter was the survival of Singapore after the independence, confirming this in an interview from 1966 with foreign press correspondents. *"This is something fundamental. We may be small but we are sovereign, and we decide how we ensure our own security"*¹¹²

In this world Singapore had to face hard challenges. Lee noted that the economics and politics became more intertwined and *"good economics must be the basis of good politics"*¹¹³ Lee believed that trade and building an industry was as important as defense and security and that defense and security were impartible from trade and industry.¹¹⁴ One of the key objectives for Singapore security was therefore to promote its trade. When talking about Singapore's foreign policy according to Lee two factors should always be taken into account. The interest of powers in the region and the effect of migration over time and space. With these factors in mind, Singapore needs to be a place where people from all over the world can settle because they bring, *"life, vitality, enterprise from many parts of the world."*¹¹⁵ Singapore would benefit when major powers help and have interest in the city-state because foreign investment is the economic development model that Lee prioritized for Singapore. With the interest of powers in the region Singapore has to be non-aligned to find a balance most profitable for itself.

¹¹¹ transcript of an interview with the Prime Minister by Jackie Sam of the straits time press and wu shih of sin chew jit poh, held at the Prime Minister's office on Tuesday, 16th November 1965. <https://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/speeches/record-details/743432e6-115d-11e3-83d5-0050568939ad>

¹¹² transcript of a television interview with the Prime Minister, Mr. Lee Kuan Yew, by three foreign press correspondents - Mr. Creighton burns of the Melbourne age, Mr. Nihal Singh of the statesman of India, and Mr. Dennis Bloodworth of the London observer, recorded at the studios of television singapura, July 28, 1966. <https://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/speeches/record-details/73d63955-115d-11e3-83d5-0050568939ad>

¹¹³ broadcast excerpts from an address given by the Prime Minister, Mr. Lee Kuan Yew, on "changing values in a shrinking world" at the political study center on 13th July 1966. <https://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/speeches/record-details/73d5f696-115d-11e3-83d5-0050568939ad>

¹¹⁴ transcript of an interview with the Prime Minister by Jackie Sam of the straits time press and wu shih of sin chew jit poh, held at the Prime Minister's office on Tuesday, 16th November 1965. <https://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/speeches/record-details/743432e6-115d-11e3-83d5-0050568939ad>

¹¹⁵ Speech by the Prime Minister, Mr. Lee Kuan Yew, at a seminar on international relations, held at the university of Singapore, October 9, 1966. <https://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/speeches/record-details/740d2959-115d-11e3-83d5-0050568939ad>

It was clear that Lee knew the future of Southeast Asia wasn't going to be decided by the Southeast Asian countries only. The three major powers he considered were the US, China and the Soviet Union. According to Lee they would have "*a profound interest in the region*" for some time and for a number of reasons. He argues Southeast Asia happens to hold a sizeable proportion of the world's population, has more than the average mineral- and other natural resources. And possesses also one of the most important sea junctions of the world for the transportation of goods. It is unlikely that there will be any technological breakthrough that will replace ships. So, the trade routes through the Strait of Malacca around Singapore will stay relevant for a long time.¹¹⁶

United States

The present vitality of the security ties between Singapore and the US stand in contrast to the Singapore's attitude towards the United States in the early days of Singapore's independence. After the separation of Singapore from the federation of Malaysia in 1965 there was little that suggested that Singapore would view the United States as a patron. In terms of foreign policy Singapore focused instead on Britain with whom Singapore's history had been intertwined.¹¹⁷ However, Lee's view on Singapore's US relationship changed quickly after the British made some decisions which turned out badly for Singapore. In 1968 the British labor government devaluated the pound by 14 percent which had devastating effects on Singapore's foreign reserves. On top of that in 1971 the British announced they were closing the Singapore naval base almost immediately. These developments shocked Lee and after some damage control he flew to the US for a sabbatical at the JFK school of government at the Harvard university. In the same year he went to New York to speak for a large crowd of decision makers at the economic club of New York about the positives of investing in Singapore.¹¹⁸ Over the next year Lee became a frequent visitor of Harvard and New York.

This marked the beginning of a close relationship between Lee and the US political and business establishment. The most remarkable conformation of this new intimate

¹¹⁶ Transcript of the question-and-answer session following the address by the Prime Minister, Mr. Lee Kuan Yew, to the foreign correspondents' club, Hong Kong, on 19th February 1970.
<https://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/speeches/record-details/737976d5-115d-11e3-83d5-0050568939ad>

¹¹⁷ See Seng Tang, "America the Indispensable Power: Singapore's Perspective of America as a Security Partner." *Asian Politics & Policy* 8, no. 1 (New York 2016): 121.

¹¹⁸ Barr, Singapore: *A Modern History*, 123.

relationship was the fact that Lee Kuan Yew's son, Lee Hsien Loong studied in the US at the US army command and general staff college and after this enrolled in a Master of Public Administration at the JFK school. Lee Hsien Loong became the third Prime Minister of Singapore in 2004. Many other ministers of the cabinet studied in the US and six out of the nineteen studied at the JFK school. This pattern seeps through to upper levels of the ministries, eleven of the twenty-five positions of permanent secretary in the Singapore civil service were held by graduates of the JFK school, including all key centers of power (Prime Minister's office, education, defense, home affairs, finance, foreign affairs, trade and industry, manpower and environment and water resources). Study in Britain is also seen by the members of the political and administrative elite's but interestingly enough we see a pattern of treating the US as a "finishing school". The master's degree is then often completed after the person has already established him of herself as a candidate for the elite.

Singapore's relationship with the United States falls neatly into three parts, during the Cold War, after the Cold War and the post 9/11 years. In the 1960s until the 1990s when the Soviets posted a threat to America and the world, Singapore and the US were in a good relationship because the strategic interest of both countries coincided. The United States wanted to balance out power in Southeast Asia against the Soviet Union and communist China and so was Singapore.¹¹⁹ With the fall of Saigon in 1975, Lee assumed that should the great powers successfully avoid war among themselves in the following two or three decades, China would eventually become the most dominant force in Asia and regard the Southeast Asian region as its rightful sphere of influence. Lee believed in the need for the United States to maintain a naval presence to balance against both the Soviet Union and China.¹²⁰ However, convincing an America still reeling from its Vietnam experience that Southeast Asian countries needed US backing did not prove easy. Both the administrations of President Carter and Reagan didn't sustain high level of interest in Southeast Asia after the Vietnam War. Carters' administration for example preferably sought closer ties with China. In response to this Lee reminded the US of their importance to security and stability in the region.¹²¹ Singapore has never formally agreed on an alliance with the US, but Tim Huxley in his work *Defending the Lion City* describes the relationship as a quasi-alliance.¹²² In 1969 the

¹¹⁹ Lee Kuan Yew, *From Third World to First: The Singapore Story: 1965-2000*. (New York 2000). 487.

¹²⁰ Transcript of press conference given by Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew in Tokyo on 22nd may, 1975. <https://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/speeches/record-details/73b2e7e4-115d-11e3-83d5-0050568939ad>.

¹²¹ Tan, *America the Indispensable Power*, 121.

¹²² Tim Huxley, *Defending the Lion City: The Armed Forces of Singapore*. (Sydney 2004), 208.

US Navy opened an office in Singapore to control and coordinate the regular ship visits during the Vietnam war. After the 1970s the US and Singapore began managing joint naval exercises. During this time the US became the main defense supplier for Singapore and during the 1980s the US air force began using Singapore as a base for their operations in the Indian Ocean.¹²³ This defense relationship began intensifying in the 1990 and 2007 specifically when the US opened its Navy region center in Singapore. This was a naval base, but they didn't want to call it a base.¹²⁴

This post-Cold war Period was marked by Singapore's effort to ensure the continuation of an American forward presence in the Asia-Pacific. The US urged the same goal and wanted to clarify their commitment to the region. The Post-Cold War goal of the US for Asia became securing access to Asian markets, where a continued US military presence would ensure regional stability, the precondition for the region's economic prosperity.¹²⁵ This goal persisted under the Clinton administration as seen by his East Asia Strategy Reports of 1995 and 1997. But despite these assurances of persisting power the post-Cold War era was characterized by the idea and debate about decline of American power, underscored by scholars like Paul Kennedy.¹²⁶ The idea that America could no longer be the main power in the region was a concern for Singapore. In 1992 when Lee had already stepped down as Prime Minister, he mourned in a speech that:

"However, no alternative balance can be as comfortable as the present one with the US as a major player. But if the US economy cannot afford a US role, then a new balance it will have to be.....The power balance without the US as a principal force will be very different from that which it now is or can be if the US remains a central player".¹²⁷

From this context the decision of Singapore in 1991 to offer its naval facilities in support of US naval operations becomes clear. Lee questioned if other powers like Japan or India could provide regional security but found them lacking in power. Lee argued:

¹²³ Huxley, *Defending the Lion City*, 208-212.

¹²⁴ Barr, *Singapore: A Modern History*, 124.

¹²⁵ Tan, *America the Indispensable Power*, 123.

¹²⁶ Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000*. (London 1989).

¹²⁷ Speech by Mr. Lee Kuan Yew, senior minister of Singapore, at the Harvard Fairbank center conference in New York: "East Asia in the new era: the prospects of co-operation" on 11 May 1992.

<https://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/speeches/record-details/74087676-115d-11e3-83d5-0050568939ad>.

*“why not stick with what has worked so far? The U.S. presence has maintained peace on the high seas of the Pacific since 1945. The American presence, in my view, is essential for the continuation of international law and order in East Asia.”*¹²⁸

In 1997 he again pointed out: *“The US remains the only superpower in the world in the full multi-dimensional meaning of the term. China cannot match the political and economic influence, the military reach or the cultural resonance of the US around the globe.”*¹²⁹

Lee still considered the engagement of China in Southeast Asia. Because according to Lee there will only be a balance of power in the Asia-Pacific region with the assurance that the US will sustain their presence in Southeast Asia. The US presence is key as a stabilizing factor. However, the military presence does not need to be used to be useful. Its presence makes a difference and ensures peace and stability in the region. *“This stability serves the interest of all, including that of China.”* Singapore’s management of its relationship with the US has been based continuously on that premise, which bears also on its relationship with China.¹³⁰ This view of need for American security didn’t change when Goh became Prime Minister and after him Lee Hsien Loong.

Singapore’s effort to retain the attention of the global powers to Southeast Asia were realized unexpectedly with the beginning of the US’s global war on terror which arguably shaped America’s grand strategy during the first decade of the 21st century. Southeast Asia became identified as the “second front” of the war on terror. The region got this label because of incidents such as the foiling of a terrorist plot in Singapore in 2001 and the bomb attacks in Bali, Indonesia in 2002. Jemaah Islamiyah or JI in short, the local affiliate of Al-Qaeda in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore had reportedly selected Singapore as its next target following 9/11. Presumably because of Singapore’s close ties with the United States and the presence of US interests and military personnel based in Singapore. The capturing of terrorists and the dismantlement of the JI network by Singaporean security services placed Singapore in the spotlight of the war on terror. This counterterrorism cooperation between Singapore and the US added a new dimension to their security partnership.¹³¹ This intensification of Singapore’s security relations with the US has arguably rendered the partnership into a vital one for both sides. As Lee Hsien Loong expressed in 2006:

¹²⁸ “Why American economic and security presence vital for Asia” in *The Straits Times*, 17 December 1991.

¹²⁹ Speech by senior minister Lee Kuan Yew at the international institute for strategic studies conference, Shangri-La hotel, Singapore, 12 Sep 97. <https://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/speeches/record-details/779f1f8f-115d-11e3-83d5-0050568939ad>

¹³⁰ Ibidem.

¹³¹ Tan, *America the Indispensable Power*, 126-127.

“Singapore and the US are close friends and strategic partners. Our relationship is excellent and covers many areas, from trade to defence and counterterrorism. The friendship has endured because it is rooted in shared interests and compatible international perspectives. Mr President, we are glad that you have found the time to visit Southeast Asia and have chosen Singapore to deliver your speech on America’s priorities in the region. America continues to play a vital role in Asia’s stability and prosperity. You have important interests here that needs to be nurtured, amidst your many other commitments worldwide. Singapore looks forward to greater US engagement in this part of the world, and I believe so do many other Southeast Asian countries.”¹³²

At the end of 2014 there were two events that show the complex problems Singapore face as security partner of the US. In December of that year a US navy combat ship named the USS Forth Worth began a 16 month during rotational deployment out of Singapore. The deployment of combat ships has been seen as an indication of the support of America’s rebalancing strategy by Singapore.¹³³ Obama described the rebalancing strategy in a speech in 2011 as the shift of the US attention from the Middle East to Asia Pacific, because of the priorities that lay in this region for the US. The strategy consists of three parts, economic, diplomatic and security/military. The latter will be of most important as the US wants to contain China’s rise in Asia.¹³⁴ This has been viewed by many people as an indication of Singapore’s support for this strategy. On the other hand, in November of the same year Singapore’s military trained alongside China’s army in Nanjing. This raised questions across the region over Singapore’s commitment to the rebalancing strategy. This tendency of Singapore to play both sides and hedge against the major powers is not surprising. Hedging has arguably become more pronounced for Singapore in the post-Cold War power context of Asia, defined threats are replaced by uncertainty. The present-day rising tensions in the South China Sea have led some states in the region to pursue closer defense ties with the US as a counterbalance to Chinese territorial claims and power. Singapore as non-claimant state have restrained from taking sides.¹³⁵

The effects of Singapore’s hedging strategy should not be missed. As seen in this chapter the US has developed itself to an invaluable partner for Singapore today. The US has

¹³² Speech by Mr. Lee Hsien Loong, Prime Minister, at the dinner hosted in honour of the us president George w bush and mrs Laura bush, 16 November 2006, 8.00 pm at the istana.
<https://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/data/pdfdoc/20061116985.htm>.

¹³³ Tan, *America the Indispensable Power*, 130-132.

¹³⁴ Danah Alenezi, "US rebalance strategy to Asia and US-China rivalry in South China Sea from the perspective of the offensive realism", *Review of Economics and Political Science*, Vol. ahead-of-print No. ahead-of-print. (2020)

¹³⁵ Tan, *America the Indispensable Power*, 130-132.

been and will remain the essential counterweight to China's power. But unlike other American allies Singapore also has spoken up on behalf of their Chinese relationship as demonstrated by Singapore's foreign minister K. Shanmugam when visiting America in 2012. Singapore felt that US officials expressed unfounded anti-China findings.¹³⁶ The essential role of the US is not always confirmed and there are certain limits. Considerably in 2004 Singapore's then Foreign Minister S. Jayakumar explained that:

*"we are not pro-U.S.; we are not anti-any country. What we are is that we are pro-Singapore in the sense that ultimately what guides us in our foreign policy is our national interest. And that remains our fundamental approach"*¹³⁷

Despite Singapore's tendency to hedge, the US remains their number one security choice within their foreign policy. Recent data from the US global leadership project (a joint effort between the Meridian International Center and Gallup to provide a comprehensive assessment of how world residents view U.S. leadership) shows that 75 percent of Singapore's population approves the US leadership. This is the highest rating by any country in Southeast Asia.¹³⁸ Also the win of the PAP during the last election of Singapore in 2015 shows that Singapore's policy towards the US will not change in the future. For Singapore the power of the US is seen as essential for the security and stability of the region, their will to keep this regional balance intact is an implicit legitimization of continued US presence in Southeast Asia.¹³⁹

¹³⁶ David Matthew, "Singapore eyes U.S. balance". *The Diplomat*. (2012, February 14). <http://the-diplomat.com/asean-beat/2012/02/14/singapore-eyes-u-s-balance/>.

¹³⁷ See Seng Tan, "America the Indispensable: Singapore's View of the United States' Engagement in the Asia-Pacific." *Asian Affairs, an American Review* 38, no. 3 (New York 2011), 167

¹³⁸ Inc, Gallup. 'U.S.-Global Leadership Project'. Gallup.com. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/161309/global-leadership-project.aspx>.

¹³⁹ Tan, *America the Indispensable Power*, 130-132.

China

As noted in the earlier chapter about Malacca, the relationship between China and the Southeast Asia region goes back to the 14th century. To protect Malacca the ruler established foreign relations with China. Because of this relationship Malacca could become a prosperous entrepot profiting from its role in the Chinese trade. Much later in 1819 when the English EIC established their settlement in Singapore the Chinese community in Singapore began to grow and after 1842 Singapore again became an entrepot linking the expanding trade between China and Southeast Asia. This in turn drew many Chinese immigrants to the Strait. Almost 60 percent of the population of Singapore in 1860 consisted of ethnic Chinese people, most of them came to Singapore under the contract-labor system. These immigrants became craftsman and traders and dominated economic life in the strait of Malacca. So, to a large extent the growth of Singapore was due to these waves of migration from China. These waves didn't only help to increase Singapore's population size but also gave rise to cultural affinity between Singapore and China. This affinity was especially seen in shared values, language, customs, beliefs and religious practices. More importantly, the immigrants from China provided an important source of labor for Singapore's economic growth.¹⁴⁰ Trade relations between Singapore and China weren't that good in the 1950's. After Singapore's independence in 1965 however, the city-state was able to pursue a more open trade policy with China that was relatively free from political and ideological hangovers.

Singapore's relation with China had been grounded in some ambiguity under Lee and Goh. Lee visited China for the first time in the 1970s, fifteen years before Singapore formally recognized China. Lee emerged as a prominent figure for China when they wanted to enter the international society during the 1980s and 1990s. Lee also set Singapore on the path to profit from China's rise.¹⁴¹

In a speech in 1965 Lee gave an analysis on the relationship between China and Southeast Asia. Lee wasn't worried about increase of power and influence by China because he did not believe that China would want to conquer physically South Asia and Southeast Asia. If you read China's history the conquering of Southeast Asia wasn't in line with it.

¹⁴⁰ Yongnian Zheng, and Lye Liang Fook, *Singapore-China Relations: 50 Years. World Scientific Series on Singapore's 50 Years of Nation-Building*. (New Jersey 2016), 7.

¹⁴¹ *Ibidem*, 35-40.

*“They are very big, self-possessed, completely self-sufficient people with enormous patience. China means, in the Chinese language, the Middle Kingdom. I mean, they were the beginning and end of the world and the outer regions where the people paid tribute to China. And that's the way it should be.”*¹⁴²

What could worry Lee about the increase of power by China was that it could make for greater dangers and miscalculation leading to wide conflicts. He points towards miscalculations on the side of Americans as to just how far the Chinese would go in backing revolution in Southeast Asia. Singapore's perspective on China however was the same as it was towards other Southeast Asian countries like Indonesia.

*“We want to be friends with all our neighbours in Asia, whether it is the biggest nation in the world in population like China, or the biggest in Asia like Indonesia. But it must be on the basis of mutual respect for each other's sovereignty and integrity and no interference in each other's internal affairs.”*¹⁴³

In 1966 Singapore established trade relations with China, but noticeable was that almost a year after Singapore became independent China still hadn't recognized Singapore as a country. Lee however didn't bother because of the trade that was established.

*“The Chinese People's Republic have maintained a very correct attitude to us. They have not recognized us, they have not criticized us; they have not condemned us, they have not praised us. They want to extend their trade with us; they have asked for more representatives for their bank here in Singapore. We have asked them to apply at a later date when we can see exactly how these trade relations can develop. And, we have left it at that. And I have not the slightest doubts again if it is of advantage to them to trade with us, they will trade. It is always of advantage to us to trade with them. But it is up to them, too.”*¹⁴⁴

In 1970 the economic relation between the two was going well. The opposite could be said about the political relation. Pointed out in this transcript of questions the political relation

¹⁴² Transcript of an interview given by the Prime Minister, Mr. Lee Kuan Yew, at nzbc house on March 11, 1965. <https://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/speeches/record-details/730045b0-115d-11e3-83d5-0050568939ad>

¹⁴³ Transcript of interview with the Prime Minister, Mr. Lee Kuan Yew, by Jackie Sam of the straits time press and wu shih of sin chew jit poh, held at the Prime Minister's office on Tuesday, November 16, 1965. <https://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/speeches/record-details/743432e6-115d-11e3-83d5-0050568939ad>

¹⁴⁴ Transcript of a press conference by the Prime Minister, Mr. Lee Kuan Yew, to local and foreign correspondents at city hall, June 2, 1966. <https://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/speeches/record-details/73d55436-115d-11e3-83d5-0050568939ad>

didn't affect the economic relation between the countries and for the time being Singapore was happy with the position they were in.

*"We have very good economic relations with China. We have not as good political relations because they do not believe that Singapore exists as an independent republic. But it has not affected our trade relations at all. And I think it is quite a reasonable and comfortable position in the circumstances."*¹⁴⁵

Those diplomatic relations at the time didn't pose a threat to Singapore. They were however of importance to Lee as he said that these relations are inevitable for the future of Singapore.¹⁴⁶ According to Lee, China would never lose interest in the Southeast Asia region. It is important for countries who are direct neighbors, or close to China, to be neutral or positively friendly towards China. If a state gets in an unstable situation with China, this could mean China would use economic 'manipulation' to rule out this particular state. They wouldn't use military power, just the economic aspect.¹⁴⁷ Lee wasn't afraid of the power of China. He would prefer that all great powers kept interest in the region, the continued presence of these powers would contribute to a more stable balance of influence.¹⁴⁸

The relationship between the countries improved with the first ever visit by Singapore's Foreign Minister S. Rajaratnam to China in 1975. This cleared the way for Lee, who flew to Beijing in 1976 and met Mao Zedong. This meeting didn't really change anything about the relation between the two countries, but Lee viewed the visit as a consideration of China, that Singapore was important enough to establish ties.¹⁴⁹ It was however Deng Xiaoping's trip to Singapore in 1978 which had a more lasting impact.¹⁵⁰ Deng was deeply impressed by the clean and ordered city he encountered. Lee on the other hand admired Deng's stated intention to free China from the political chaos created by Mao

¹⁴⁵ Transcript of question - and - answer session following the Prime Minister's luncheon address at the reception given him by the French diplomatic press association, at hotel George v, Paris on 25th September 1970. <https://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/speeches/record-details/72952977-115d-11e3-83d5-0050568939ad>

¹⁴⁶ Transcript of press conference given by the Prime Minister in Tokyo, on 11 May 1973. <https://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/speeches/record-details/735390df-115d-11e3-83d5-0050568939ad>

¹⁴⁷ transcript of an interview with the Prime Minister, Mr. Lee Kuan Yew, by Mr. Anthony Rendell, recorded in London by the Australian broadcasting commission, September 17, 1966. <https://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/speeches/record-details/7403efe1-115d-11e3-83d5-0050568939ad>

¹⁴⁸ Excerpts of address by Singapore's Prime Minister, Mr. Lee Kuan Yew, on the change in great power relations at the commonwealth heads of government meeting in Ottawa on Friday, August 3, 1973. <https://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/speeches/record-details/735a50b6-115d-11e3-83d5-0050568939ad>

¹⁴⁹ Lee, *From Third World to First*, 582.

¹⁵⁰ Zheng, *Singapore-China Relations*, 10.

Zedong. Deng saw Singapore as a model for what he wanted to build in China. In a speech during his Southern Tour in 1992, Deng praised Lee's achievements. "*Singapore's social order is rather good. Its leaders exercise strict management,*" he told officials. "*We should learn from their experience*"¹⁵¹

Singapore's relationship with China grew progressively on a pragmatic basis. With this developing relationship Singapore saw economic opportunity. These opportunities were expressed by intensive contact and securing contracts between the two countries. One striking indication of this intensified involvement in China's economic modernization was the appointment of former minister of finance, Goh Keng Swee, as an advisor on the development of economic zones and tourism for China, in 1985. A more explicit development of Singapore's growing relation with China's economic development was the agreement they made to build an industrial park together in Suzhou in 1993. Singapore made a vast capital investment in China, albeit with mixed returns.¹⁵²

In addition to these economic opportunities, considerations of the balance of power in the region also played a role when dealing with China. China also put an additional shadow on Singapore which caused suspicion by other states in the region. This additional Chinese shadow is the fact that Singapore is the only other country with an ethnic Chinese majority in the world. This part of Singapore's identity is a critical component of its vulnerability towards China which they can never exclude. The government therefore has to address continuously the China factor into their foreign policy. They fear both a too strong China and a China lost in anarchy. The latter is to be feared more as this could lead to regional turmoil. So, for the city state it is best to cooperate with a stable/strong China.¹⁵³ Considering this background, it was the perfect opportunity for Singapore to offer an alternative model of political economy in the 1980s. Fact is that Singapore has benefitted from China's change of course in economic association. This has given Singapore a vantage point from which to assume the best course of action for dealing with a rising China. In its relationship with China, Singapore has been driven by economic advantage and by geopolitical and cultural concerns.¹⁵⁴

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, Singapore does no longer see China as a threat for its independence. But China is still a rising power, with the goal to expand its power in Southeast Asia. China is watched carefully by Singapore because of the city state's ethnic

¹⁵¹ Sebastian Strangio, *In the Dragon's Shadow: Southeast Asia in the Chinese Century*. (London 2020), 189.

¹⁵² Michael Leifer, *Singapore's Foreign Policy: Coping with Vulnerability* (New York 2000), 117.

¹⁵³ *Ibidem*, 118.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibidem*.

identity and associations with the major power. This makes management of the relationship with China a sensitive matter of the highest priority. Singapore is hardly in a position to manage the relationship between China and Southeast Asia. It is obliged to use whatever influence it can to serve their own interests.¹⁵⁵

The Sino-Singapore relationship can be characterized by the words that ‘there are no outstanding issues and no areas of open conflict between them’.¹⁵⁶ Even today, Singapore is one of the only nations with a coast, facing the Pacific Ocean, that is not in conflict with China over their claims of territory in the South China Sea. 2016 however was a bad year for Singapore’s relationship with China. Most of the damage done to the bond between the countries was self-inflicted. Lee Hsien Loong upset Chinese leadership by promoting the US connection a little bit too much during his visit to the White House. After the visit Singapore engaged in a high-profile attack on the Chinese claims in the South China Sea.¹⁵⁷ Another hurting development is the fact that China tried to drive a wedge between Singapore and its longtime partner Taiwan. China considers Taiwan a breakaway province it has vowed to retake, by force if necessary. Taiwan’s leaders say it is clearly much more than a province, arguing that it is a sovereign state.¹⁵⁸ The tension between China and Singapore spiked when in 2016 China seized Singaporean military vehicles that came back from Taiwan. This incident can be seen as a turning point in the relationship.

China is putting more pressure on Singapore and is trying to get the upper hand. Scholars like David Han and Alan Chong claim that China has changed. Singapore must now act carefully so that its actions cannot be seized upon by China as unfriendly acts against their foreign policy.¹⁵⁹

However, Singapore is always aware of the fragile relationship with China. They must adapt to the dynamics of the big powers and their regional partners. This balancing and hedging between protecting Singapore’s goals and its vulnerabilities is what is so important. Some experts suggest that China’s recent rise in economic and military power might signal a tipping point in the balance of power from the US to China, particularly within Asia. Whether this is

¹⁵⁵ Leifer, *Singapore's Foreign Policy*, 121.

¹⁵⁶ Zheng, *Singapore-China Relations*, 3.

¹⁵⁷ Ibidem.

¹⁵⁸ ‘What’s behind the China-Taiwan Divide?’ *BBC News*, May 26, 2021, sec. Asia.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-34729538>.

¹⁵⁹ ‘CO17022 | Foreign Policy Lessons from the Terrex Episode | RSIS’. <https://www.rsis.edu.sg/rsis-publication/rsis/co17022-foreign-policy-lessons-from-the-terrex-episode/#.YNSNGi2QIQI>.

true remains to be seen, but Singapore will be watching carefully because their life depends on it.¹⁶⁰

¹⁶⁰ Singapore Policy Journal. 'A Historical Perspective on Singapore-China Relations: 1965-1975', 24 October 2019. <https://spj.hkspublications.org/2019/10/25/a-historical-perspective-on-singapore-china-relations-1965-1975/>.

Conclusion

The foreign policy of Singapore was shaped by its location and unique situation as an island state with no hinterland. For the first Prime Minister Lee foreign affairs were of major importance to Singapore, a matter of life and death. Lee was v aware of the need to establish power to survive as a sovereign state. Singapore needed to position itself between the leading countries in the world, who contest for supremacy in the region. When talking about Singapore's foreign policy according to Lee two factors should always be taken into account. The interest of powers in the region and the effect of migration over time and space.

Because Southeast Asia happens to hold a sizeable proportion of the world's population, has more than the average mineral- and other natural resources and possesses also one of the most important sea junctions of the world for the transportation of goods, the foreign powers will always have interest in the region. Therefore, the future isn't going to be decided by the Southeast Asian countries alone.

Singapore's relationship with the United States falls neatly into three parts, during the Cold War, after the Cold War and the post 9/11 years. Singapore has never formally agreed on an alliance with the US, but the relationship is seen as a quasi-alliance. US military presence would ensure regional stability, the precondition for the region's economic prosperity. Lee also considered the engagement of China in Southeast Asia. Because according to Lee there will only be a balance of power in the Asia-Pacific region with the assurance that the US will sustain their presence in Southeast Asia. Singapore's management of its relationship with the US has been based continuously on that premise.

The relationship can also be rather complex. The tendency of Singapore to play both sides and hedge against the major powers is not surprising. Hedging has arguably become more pronounced for Singapore in the post-Cold War power context of Asia. Defined threats are replaced by uncertainty. Despite Singapore's tendency to hedge, the US remains their number one security choice within their foreign policy.

For Singapore the power of the US is seen as essential for the security and stability of the region.

The relationship between China and the Southeast Asia region goes back to the 14th century. Singapore's relation with China had been grounded in some ambiguity under Lee and Goh. Lee visited China for the first time in the 1970s, fifteen years before Singapore formally recognized China.

Lee wasn't worried about increase of power and influence by China because he did not believe that China would want to physically conquer Southeast Asia. The increase of power by China could however make for greater dangers and miscalculation (on the side of American government) leading to wide conflicts.

Diplomatic relations with China were important. According to Lee China would never lose interest in the Southeast Asia region. It is important for countries who are direct neighbors, or close to China, to be neutral or positively friendly towards China.

He would prefer that all great powers kept interest in the region, the continued presence of these powers would contribute to a more stable balance of influence.

Singapore's relationship with China grew progressively on a pragmatic basis. With this developing relationship Singapore saw economic opportunity. These opportunities were expressed by intensive contact and securing contracts between the two countries.

The fact that Singapore is the only other country in the world with an ethnic Chinese majority is a critical component of its vulnerability towards China, which they can never exclude. The government therefore has to address continuously the China factor into their foreign policy. The Sino-Singapore relationship can be characterized by the words that 'there are no outstanding issues and no areas of open conflict between them'. Singapore is always aware of the fragile relationship with China. They must adapt to the dynamics of the big powers and their regional partners. This balancing and hedging between protecting Singapore's goals and its vulnerabilities is what is so important.

Singapore's foreign policy is largely based on geopolitical factors. The three pillars described in the theory are clearly reflected in the foreign policy of Singapore. Singapore must take into account their location, the political situation in southeast Asia, the influence of world powers and the population building of Singapore itself.

Conclusion

The history of Singapore is older than the history of the city-state. Originally founded by the English, it is an Asian city with Malay influences and a mainly ethnic Chinese population. In the 15th century, Singapore's predecessor, Malacca, played the most important role as a major trading center in Southeast Asia. With the arrival of Europeans in the 16th century, the balance in the region changed. Singapore was founded in 1819, when Stamford Raffles sought a permanent settlement for the English in Southeast Asia. Raffles may be the founder of Singapore, it was Lee Kuan Yew, Singapore's first Prime Minister who, after independence in 1965, allowed the country to grow into modern-day Singapore. Many factors that made Malacca so prosperous still play a role in Singapore today. With his domestic and foreign policy, Lee left his mark on Singapore which is still very noticeable. The extent to which geopolitical factors influenced Singapore's domestic and foreign policy is central to this study.

The first chapter of the thesis discusses the history of Southeast Asia and the emergence of Singapore until independence in 1965. Knowledge of the history of the region is necessary to put geopolitical patterns in the right context and show that these patterns were determined in the region.

The second main study describes the domestic politics of the newly created state of Singapore. With tactical acumen, the government, and specifically Prime Minister Lee, made use of the geopolitical factors present, such as the location of the state. Prosperity of this special city-state also required insight into the obstructive geopolitical factors. Lee knows how to use or eliminate these with his extraordinary way of governing and organizing.

Finally, the third chapter deals with Singapore's foreign policy after 1965. Geopolitical factors also play an important role here. In order to survive as a small young state in a region full of tensions, the government made remarkable choices. They know how to remain friends with great powers that are each other's enemy. This is a role that they can play well thanks to their long history of trade and domination.

Looking at the research question, I can conclude that geopolitical factors have always played a very important role in the (pre)history of Singapore and will continue to be of great importance. The way Singapore has used and continues to use these factors is one of the main reasons that the State of Singapore exists in this form and is still thriving. Geopolitical factors appear to play a crucial role in every aspect of this study.

Looking at Singapore's future, I think geopolitical factors will continue to play a major role. The city-state will have to continue to balance between the great powers, because

Singapore needs some form of protection and is too small to establish this power themselves. Because of their relationship with the various superpowers, I think their position is fairly safe. At the moment, America is guarding the peace in the region, but should China expand its power, Singapore could possibly build the same relationship with China as it always had with the US. Nevertheless, I don't expect China to take this role in the near future. In addition, I also don't think Singapore wants Chinese protectorate because of the Western, capitalist values that they adhere to. But on the other hand, I do think Singapore is able to adapt to new situations if necessary.

At last, it's important for both foreign and domestic policy that the government of Singapore considers another geopolitical factor, being their surface area. The state depends on trade and foreign companies. Surface expansion is virtually not possible and yet Singapore will have to remain attractive to the region and the world. Beneficial to Singapore is the fact that transport through the Strait of Malacca, and therefore along Singapore, will be expected to continue for a long time. As long as Singapore is innovative enough, for example at the forefront of technology, limited space doesn't need to be a problem.

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Acknowledgment

I would like to thank dr. Mano Delea for the guidance during the writing of this thesis, the online consults and the research workshops. I would also like to thank my fellow students from the research group, without them this strange online year would have been a lot harder.