

# The Singaporean Development Model

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## Abstract:

Younger than the current generation of pensioners, Singapore who gained full independence in 1965 will be celebrating fifty years of independence next year. This young state propelled itself from a considerably poor state with few natural resources into one of the most efficient and rich states on the globe. A centre of industry and education, Singapore can be seen by many in the third world as a role model for development. This begs the question, can Singapore's remarkable success be replicated elsewhere and be used as a new framework for developing countries to employ? Unfortunately, the answer is no. This paper will outline the different facets of the Singaporean state and its development to outline the rationale and the 'Singaporean model'.

## Korte samenvatting in het Nederlands:

Als een van's werelds jongste landen, is Singapore jonger dan de huidige generatie van gepensioneerden. Toen Singapore in 1965 onafhankelijk werd was het een arm land met weinig natuurlijke hulpbronnen. Sindsdien heeft Singapore zichzelf getransformeerd tot een van de meest efficiënte en rijke landen ter wereld. Als een centrum van kennis en economische zaken, staat Singapore ten voorbeeld aan ontwikkelingslanden. Hierbij is de vraag, kan het Singaporese model gedupliceerd worden? Helaas is het antwoord néé. In dit stuk zal de Singaporese staat en zijn ontwikkeling beschreven en geanalyseerd worden.

## **Introduction**

A city that rose from the ocean stands as a beacon of economic prosperity in South Eastern Asia. Singapore, a small city and island state at the southern tip of the Malaysian peninsula put itself on the map as an independent state on the back of its economic prowess. Despite only gaining independence from their colonial rulers in 1963, over the course of 3 decades, Singapore transformed from a poor state exporting stables to an economic powerhouse, supporting industrial and financial activities (Conteh, 2010). Despite its ascent to the club of industrial states, it still clearly distinguishes itself from the Western members on nearly every field of governance. It is this approach, different from the Western model that makes Singapore an appealing case study for other post-colonial or industrializing states. This paper is written to determine the applicability of this model.

While the author recognises that no model can be applied universally, Singapore can provide a basic template which might be adjusted to particular cases if governments and citizens express an interest in economic and social transformation. In order to conceptualize any such framework, one must first trace the development of Singapore and understand its current state. It is important to note, this paper shall not provide the framework but the underlying information that can be used to build such a framework. Therefore, this paper will study the following issues: Singapore's economic miracle, its economic policies, political policies, and social policies.

## **Colonial Past**

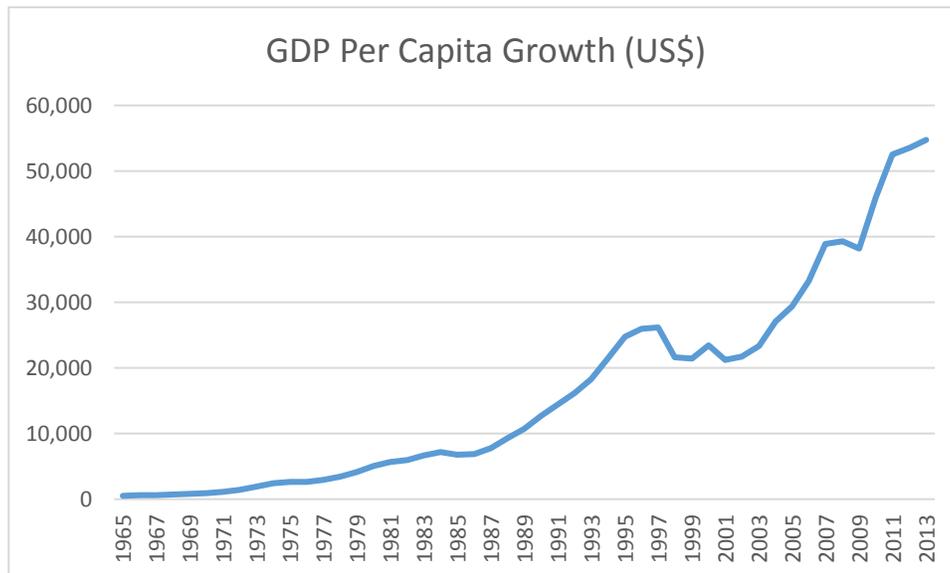
Inhabited before 1819 when the British first landed on the island of Singapore, Sir Thomas Raffles purchased land on the island in the name of the East India Company, intending to use it as a trading site (Leinbach, 2013). The British would retain control of the territory for centuries, until 1959, when Singapore gained self-rule. This implied that while Singapore had an assembly which had certain powers, the British crown still retained authority over the country. It was not until 1963 that Singapore gained its independence from the United Kingdom and was absorbed into the Malaysian Federation. Another two years later, in 1965, Singapore gained full independence, becoming a state in its own right (Freedom house, 2014). Aware of their relatively weak global position, Singapore was committed to being a strong developmentalist state from 1963 on when it joined the Malaysian Federation. To this effect, the central government would

engage in a hands-on approach to economic development and actively drive the Singaporean economy. Singaporean economic policy was based on the adherence to fiscal conservatism and the principle of ‘living within our means’ (Lee and Haque, 2006).

### **Economic Miracle**

In 1965 when Singapore gained full independence and pursued a strategy of strong state-lead developmentalism, it had a GDP per capita of US\$516 (2013 dollar values). Since then, they have managed to increase their GDP per capita to US\$54,776 in 2013. This marks a staggering 106 fold increase over approximately 50 years (Department of Statistics Singapore, 2014). Singapore has managed to establish themselves as one of the countries with the highest GDP per capita globally (Haque, 2004). Singapore’s most valuable tools in spurring forth their astounding economic growth were the government linked corporations (GLCs) and the government’s use of holding companies. Inherently, Singapore has little in terms of natural resources to offer. Recognizing this major hurdle, they turned to industry and the one resource they could properly cultivate: knowledge.

Figure 1.1



(Department of Statistics Singapore, 2014)

When Singapore gained independence, it lacked an established manufacturing sector as well as the necessary infrastructure to give rise to an advanced economy (Yeung, 2004). However, despite the challenges this imposed, it also presented an opportunity. The state became responsible for the provision of public infrastructure. The government created numerous state-owned companies and statutory boards which would be responsible for creating roads, electricity, transportation, and numerous other services (Yeung, 2004). In this manner, the government was able to provide large scale employment. Historically, other countries and leaders have also used public works to achieve similar ends. The Singaporean government used this as a springboard to become active in many more elements of the national economy. The state-owned companies gave birth to several other companies, or spin-offs from the original companies. The companies would become known as Government Linked Companies (GLCs). They earned this name because the state retained significant influence over the company's management through one of a number of government owned holding companies, the most prominent of which are: Temasek Holdings, Singapore Technologies, MinCom Holdings, and MND Holdings (Yeung, 2004).

Keenly aware of their precarious position in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, no manufacturing base, little to no natural resources to sell, and not particularly wealthy, the Singaporean government could not revolutionize the country by itself. They were greatly in need of foreign assistance to make their transformation a reality. Therefore, it became the aim of the government to change Singapore to make it highly conducive to foreign investment. In this endeavour, the government passed several pieces of legislation regulating the labour force. Three bills were of particular importance, the Trade Union Bill (1966), the Employment Act (1968), and the Industrial Relations Act (1960), these ensured the creation of a highly disciplined, as the government advertised them, labour force, as well as a force that was depoliticised (Yeung, 2004).

Yet, when one attempted to industrialize in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, one was generally faced with the issue of communist influence. As the Singaporean government had no desire to fall under the sway of Communism, the leadership positioned itself well. Ever since Singapore gained self-rule, one party had dominated the political sphere, the People's Action Party, or PAP. Upon coming to power, the PAP recognized their relatively weak political position. Despite being

known as an ethnically and religiously diverse country, the Chinese form a significant majority in the country. As such, the Chinese business elites had an inherent influence over the governance and power within the country. If the PAP wanted to restructure the economy, as they did, it would require unseating the power of the Chinese businesses, and historically, no group has taken kindly to being usurped. In order to change the Singaporean economy system, the PAP would have to change the power structure which demanded they create a firm alliance. Internally, the PAP sided with the moderate trade unions. In order to draw in the capital, the PAP turned its eyes outwards towards foreign investors. With these ties, the PAP had built up enough legitimacy to challenge the influence of the Chinese business tycoons and push through their political and economic reforms (Conteh, 2010).

Holding companies formed the economic arm of the government. Given an active entrepreneurial role, they drove development by investing and initiating industrialization. These holding companies would invest, launch, and run different companies in which the government would retain influence by means of being a majority or minor shareholder. These companies are the famed GLCs. These companies, also referred to as first tier companies, would own additional companies, second tier companies, who would in turn own other companies and so forth. The purpose of these enterprises was profit generation, the result of which was also the development of the Singaporean economy (Ang and Ding, 2006). Seeing to it that the holding companies were state-owned and that many of the companies were government linked, the PAP could still drive corporate policies and keep industry in line with the country's macroeconomic policy (Lee and Haque, 2006). By means of this complex web of enterprises, combining state-lead industry with free market profit-driven capitalism, Singapore managed to ride the wave of unprecedented economic growth while the government retained control of the reins, guiding the economy into the direction they desired.

When one attempts to present a summary of the Singaporean economic success story, it is worth mentioning, that while it was successful in Singapore, it does not imply that the model can easily be forced upon another state and yield the same results. Upon its independence, Singapore was a relatively weak state, both in terms of its military and economy. The island state has a landmass of 647.5 km<sup>2</sup> and in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century had little to offer the global market (Haque, 2004). Unlike many other developing countries who are relatively resource rich, Singapore could

not strip its land in an attempt to bolster its economy or attempt to take part in the global trade. Furthermore, Singapore also lacked a strong manufacturing base which acted as an additional hurdle. As such, Singapore was in a highly disadvantaged state, so it turned to the one resource it could develop, human capital. However, such an endeavour would require vast reforms of the existing structures and any such change is usually faced with resistance. However, due to wise political manoeuvring, the PAP managed to place itself in such a position that it could reform Singapore and attempt to bring about what would later be regarded as an economic miracle. In collaboration with foreign investors who financed the beginnings of Singapore's economic transformation, the country established strong state-owned companies who drove the economy. This brought about a self-perpetuating and snowball effect. Once the Singaporean economy began to get onto its feet, it kept expanding, the state-owned companies invested and bought more companies who in turn did the same. This expansion was only possible because of the government's firm commitment to developing its human capital, making it a highly attractive location for investment in the first place. Thus, once Singapore had established an educated and 'disciplined' labour force, as well as the tools to industrialize, the economy expanded at an exponential rate.

After establishing themselves as an economic powerhouse at home, Singapore turned its gaze outwards. Embracing the capitalist motto, it was not content with staying put, but wanted to expand, grow, and get more. This step helped Singapore move into a position to become not merely an attractive investment location and establish a strong national economy, but take the stage as a global economic actor. The different ministries within the government encouraged the holding companies and the GLCs to begin investing abroad, primarily in the neighbouring region (Lee and Haque, 2006).

The Singaporean motives for expanding their economic reach beyond their own borders are plentiful, yet there are two of prime importance. Firstly, despite the PAP's original alliance with foreign investors, the country did not intend to remain dependent on them. The investment of foreign investors helped establish the Singaporean government, yet, they did want to establish their own sense of control. Thus, using their own means, in the 1990's the Singaporean government attempted to benefit from the economic expansion in the region. By becoming involved in neighbouring economies that were experiencing economic booms, Singapore could

also benefit, acting in a manner similar to the investors who had helped Singapore get on its feet (Yeung, 2004). Yet again, this desire to expand Singaporean corporate entanglement within its region was driven by the government. However, the transformation of Singapore's GLCs to Multi-National Corporations (MNCs) also entailed direct economic benefits for the companies themselves. As the region played host to a number of states with lower labour costs, the Singaporean companies were encouraged to establish production centres in different countries throughout the region, reducing production costs and in turn increasing revenue (Lee and Haque, 2006). Yet, this expansion into sovereign countries did not go unnoticed. Several of the host nations expressed concern in having GLCs active in their territory, claiming that these corporations have the power to influence internal affairs of the host nation. By extension, the states are arguing that the Singaporean government is granting itself the ability to impact the internal affairs of a host country, violating their right to sovereignty (Ang and Ding, 2005).

### **Economic Policy**

Singapore's economy grew under heavy government guidance and leadership. In the 1980s, the government also led the push for corporate expansion of the Singaporean industry beyond the country's borders. However, current economic policies mark a change of direction, a weakening of the government's direct grip in economic matters. The current Singaporean economic policy is one of increased liberalization and privatization. Holding companies are selling their stakes in numerous companies and many more are becoming tradable on the Singaporean and other stock exchanges (Haque, 2004). However, Singapore retains its hold over strategic industries (Yeung, 2004). This is not a strategy unique to Singapore, many western states also maintain a degree of control and influence over strategic industries.

One of the rationales for the government's heavy involvement in the economy during the mid-1900s was the lack of adequate infrastructure and industry which demanded a strong public sector. This tide is turning, the government's guiding hand is subsiding as it allows industry to partake in the private sector. Against this backdrop, the government maintains a degree of influence. Strong ties remain between the political, administrative and business elites in Singapore. A great number of former civil servants and politicians hold prominent positions in Singaporean industry, primarily in GLCs (Lee and Haque, 2004). The implication is that

regardless of the amount of corporations which were formally GLCs or held by the various holding companies, much of its administrative network will remain linked to the government in some manner. The informal ties between the former bureaucrats and politicians to those still active in the government may act as an additional means to control and influence the companies. Thus, while industry in Singapore is privatizing and being let out of the governments grip, the inherent nature of these industries allows the government to maintain a degree of influence. Despite this loophole, the Singaporean government is strict in its implementation of the law. Holding companies and GLCs are held to the same standards as those not affiliated to the government. The Singaporean government ensures that laws which are passed are applicable to all, regardless of their affiliations, in that sense, private and government affiliated are treated as equal (Ang and Ding, 2006).

As mentioned above, Singapore's natural resource pool is severely limited. As such, they have capitalized on what is available to them. An overwhelming majority of Singapore's economy is dominated by the service sector, 66.2%. Singapore has managed to establish itself as one of the most diverse economies in all of Asia (Conteh, 2010). One of their most valued tools was, and remains, education. Singapore has made a name for itself for its commitment to the development of its human resources, knowledge based economy, and commitment to education. Singapore has placed high importance on the value of their human resources since their independence and they have served as an avenue to their economic success. Until the end of the 1900s, Singapore, a city, had two universities, both public. Yet as with their economy, the education system, also very successful, began to undergo review and reforms starting in the 1980s. Thus, aside from establishing the countries first private university, Singapore Management University, the two public universities, NTU and NUS were given more autonomy. In exchange for the ability to have greater autonomy over their curricula's, recruitment, and reward mechanisms for their staff, they were also given more accountability to ensure the effective and efficient management of the institutions. These reforms were intended to improve the educational system further and ensure an internationally renowned higher education system of the highest quality (Mok, 2011).

Despite the independence educational systems have been granted, the government and its various entities still manage to recruit and draw in many of its highly educated citizens. One

strategy employed by the government is a strategy of ‘bonded scholarship’. The brightest students are given the opportunity to attend the best universities world-wide on the expense of the government. Upon the completion of their education, they must then return to Singapore and work for the entity which funded their schooling. This process begins during the students’ secondary education. In Singapore, all males are required to take part in the National Service<sup>1</sup>. Those identified with the most promising academic results are grouped in ‘scholars’ platoons’ where they undergo officer training and are considered for scholarship. The most qualified of these, and the women who do not have to undergo National Service are then offered bonded scholarship (Barr, 2006). This approach draws the brightest of the Singaporean society into the government and bureaucratic system. Giving them a foothold, while at the same time avoiding the ever problematic issue of brain drain.

### **Political Sphere**

An arena in which Singapore stands out as unique when compared to most of its other developed compatriots, is its political structure. A large number of different terms have been used to describe the Singaporean regime. Singapore has been termed a technocracy with meritocratic elitism (Barr, 2006), an oligarchy (Conteh, 2010), a soft-authoritarianism (Dressel, 2014), a politico-administrative regime (Lee and Haque, 2006), and of course, a democracy (Conteh, 2010). Each of these classifications considers different elements of Singapore’s political nature. Yet, what remains consistent is Singapore’s reputation as a regime committed to effective and competent leadership (Haque, 2004).

From a constitutional standpoint, Singapore is ruled by an 87 member unicameral legislature (Freedom House, 2014). Elected to serve a 5 year term, the government imposed an elaborate method to attempt to represent as much of the country’s diversity within the governing body as possible. The constitution provides for three different types of parliamentarians; elected, non-constituency, and nominated. The elected members, who form the majority of the MPs, are also classified into two different groups depending on the type of constituency they were elected from; Single Member Constituencies (SMC) or Group Representation Constituencies (GRC). In a SMC, one individual is elected to represent the constituency; 12 of such constituencies exist. In a

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<sup>1</sup> The National Service will be elaborated on later in this paper.

GRC, between 3 and 6 individuals are elected from the constituency. However, in order to maintain harmony between the different religious and ethnic groups in the country, as well as ensuring minority representation, at least one representative must be from the Malay, Indian or other minority communities. With a total of 27 constituencies, 15 are GRC. In terms of electoral system, Singapore employs a first-past-the-post approach (Elections Department Singapore, 2014).

The second classification of MP are the Non-Constituency Members of Parliament (NCMP). This classification exists in order to ensure an opposition voice in parliament (Elections Department Singapore, 2014). While the PAP has held a vast majority in parliament since Singapore's self-rule era, the constitution provides for seats within parliament to be occupied by the opposition. NCMPs are given a seat to ensure that parliament has 9 members from political parties who do not form the government (Elections Department Singapore, 2014). This implies that if 10 opposition members are elected to parliament, there shall be no NCMP, but if only 5 are elected, 4 NCMPs will be provided with seats. This is a noble approach by the framers of the Singaporean constitution to ensure that one voice would not become the sole voice of Singapore. Although it does not mitigate the threat of the tyranny of the majority, it does ensure that the majority does not stand unopposed.

Finally, the third form of parliamentarian is the Nominated Member of Parliament (NMP). These are Singaporean citizens who are nominated by a special select committee of parliament and appointed by the President. These individuals may not take up more than 9 seats in parliament. However, it is important to note that both NMPs and NCMPs are not allowed to take part in votes pertaining to financial nor constitutional matters (Elections Department Singapore, 2014).

This conglomeration of parliamentarians are led by a Prime Minister. Appointed by the president, the individual is tasked with the management and leadership of the parliament. Although appointed and not elected like the president, the Prime Minister holds the seat of true power within the Singaporean political system. Since the country's inception, only three individuals have held this title, the first of which, Lee Kuan Yew, maintained power for three decades before stepping down in 1990. Despite his resignation he assumed the position of Senior

Minister and in 2004 when his son was appointed to Prime Minister, Lee Kuan Yew took the title of Minister Mentor. He would resign this post and leave political office in 2011 after over half a century in government, starting when Singapore gained self-rule (Freedom House, 2014).

As mentioned above, unlike the Prime Ministership, the Presidency is a largely ceremonial role. Furthermore, it was not until 1991 that the president was popularly elected by the population (Barr, 2006). Although imbued with significant power such as the appointment of the Prime Minister and the Cabinet, its role is limited. The office of the president also reflects the technocratic and meritocratic nature of Singapore. Chapter one of the Singaporean constitution outlines the procedure and qualifications for a presidential election. A president of Singapore is vetted by a special committee to ensure that the candidate meets certain conditions. Furthermore, this committee ensures that any candidate is a person of “integrity, good character and reputation” (Constitution of the Republic of Singapore, Article 19(2e), 2010). Additional conditions put forth by article 19 of the constitution include; the fact that a candidate cannot be part of a political party, must have held one of a list of specified jobs, is not engaged in the commercial sector nor holding another government office (Constitution of the Republic of Singapore, Article 19, 2010). The second condition, that a candidate must have held one of a number of predetermined jobs demonstrates the meritocratic and technocratic nature of Singapore. However, this condition is not outlandish, it is an attempt to ensure that the country's head of state has the necessary qualifications and experience to lead the country. Furthermore, on the surface, the office of the president exemplifies a desire to keep politics out of governance. Yet in reality, the success hereof is debatable.

Aside from the legislative and executive, the third branch of the government, the judiciary also merits discussion. As with most industrialized countries, the Singaporean constitution ensures that the judicial authority is vested in the courts (Constitution of the Republic of Singapore, Article 93, 2010). Various databases and tracking organizations have ranked the Singaporean judicial system among the highest in the world, and the country is renowned for its strict implementation of the law (OSAC, 2014). Despite this division of competencies and Singapore's prestige, serious concerns have been raised in regard to the judiciary's independence. What is of particular interest among critics is the judiciary's ability to not oppose the government. The Supreme Court has also been very careful in exercising their judicial review

power, seeing but 79 cases of that nature since its inception in 1957. Critics of the government also claim that the method of judge selection acts as a means to keep critical judges out of the discussion and prevent high level courts from becoming engaged in political cases. Claims have come forth stating that some judges are appointed because of their silence on political issues. Some describe the highest bench as divided between technical and political judges (Dressel, 2014).

The appointment of the most highly ranked members also falls squarely on the president. The president has the authority appoint the Chief Justice, Judges of Appeal, and Judges of the High Court (Constitution of the Republic of Singapore article 95(1), 2010). This power cannot be impeded by parliament, as the constitution clearly stipulates that there shall be no debate in parliament in regards to appointments (Constitution of the Republic of Singapore, Article 99, 2010). The Constitution does lay out that the president may get advice from his Prime Minister and from the Chief Justice<sup>2</sup> (Constitution of the Republic of Singapore, Section VIII, 2010). The Constitution obviously provides qualifications for an individual to become eligible for such a position (Constitution of the Republic of Singapore Article 96, 2010), but aside from that it is up to the president's discretion. This freedom has been cause of concern among critics of the government. The president's ability to directly appoint judges has raised claims that the judges which are appointed have clear PAP links (Dressel, 2014).

A subject closely linked to that of the judiciary, is that of the freedoms awarded to individuals under the protection of the Singaporean government. In the case of Singapore, three such freedoms are of particular interest; freedom of religion, freedom of speech, and freedom of information. Tied to these freedoms is also the freedom of the press. Freedom of religion and freedom of speech are both protected under the framework of the Singaporean constitution. However, there are caveats to both of these guarantees the government promises to its subjects. Freedom of speech is allowed within good measure and the constitution outlines how it can be curtailed. While certain laws are still in place from Singapore's colonial past, the laws which limit freedom of speech generally focus on maintaining religious harmony, ethnic harmony, preventing the instigation of violence, interference of domestic policies and issues of national

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<sup>2</sup> When the appointment is not for the office of Chief Justice

interest, and security. Seditious material is also outlawed (Freedom House, 2014). This list does give off the appearance that there are a great many limitations on the constitutionally guaranteed right, and while there is no denying that there are limits on speech, other countries also limit freedom of speech, some might simply use other means. Yet, the case of Singapore is more severe than other industrialized states. These limits bleed over into the press, and can limit its ability to freely act. In fact, the government has also passed several laws allowing them to censor publications. All media outlets and internet providers are required to be licensed on an annual bases. Moreover, there are more stringent regulations on outlets which offer religious or political content. Films which undertake a political purpose are entirely banned unless sponsored by the government. This has resulted in a dominance of state-owned or -controlled print and broadcast media. Yet, the government does not stop merely with domestic content. Although foreign newspapers and magazines circulate mainly unaltered, the government limits circulation (Freedom House, 2014).

This strict information security culture also manifests with considerable amounts of self-censorship on the behalf of the reporters. However, this does not imply that the government is afraid to act. The PAP has brought civil and criminal defamation cases against individuals for what they send out intending to silence or bankrupt them. Furthermore, the government has also authored laws on the subject which had the same purpose. Journalists investigating the impartiality of courts have even been held in contempt of court and arrested. Freedom House awarded Singapore a score of 67 for press freedom in 2013, ranking it as not free (Freedom House [2], 2014). Reporters without Borders ranked Singapore 149<sup>th</sup> in the world in 2013 (Reporters without Borders, 2014). Despite its strict handling of information security, the rationale is the protection of Singapore's cultural and civil cohesion. The cultural and religious plurality in the country can be used as explanation for their strict handling of the issue. Within this context, it is not unsurprising that Singapore has no freedom of information law (Freedom House, 2014).

Although Singapore might at times present tendencies or be accused of cronyism and patronage, it does retain the mantel of a country which has historically maintained low levels of corruption (Freedom House, 2014). Based on the Transparency International corruption perception index of 2013, Singapore ranked the 5<sup>th</sup> least corrupt country in the world. Based on

Transparency's scoring system, Singapore is ranked on par with Norway, 4<sup>th</sup> least corrupt, and only 7 points out of a total of 100, behind the least corrupt country, Denmark which scored 91 (Transparency International, 2014). However, in spite of Singapore's impeccable reputation in this regard, they suffer from a lack of transparency. This is exemplified in their strict media culture described above (Freedom house, 2014).

As a testament to Singapore's identity as a democratic state, their most recent elections did both their reputation and their founders proud. The 2011 elections marked the first contested presidential elections in the country since 1993. Moreover, it also saw the greatest number of opposition members enter into office as well as PAP losing an election in a Single-Member Constituency. Despite how this might sound, in 2011 the unprecedented success of the opposition implied that they secured 6 elected seats. Additionally, they were awarded their 2 seats under the constitutional obligation. This represents the highest number of elected opposition members since Singapore's independence. However, the PAP dominance appears worrisome when one looks into the electoral math. The PAP secured 81 seats in the 87 seat assembly but secured only 60% of the overall vote (Freedom House, 2014). This results stems in part from Singapore's reliance on a first-past-the-post election system.

While some states struggle with slow or inefficient bureaucracy, the Singaporeans developed a method of dealing with such challenges. Starting in 1994, the government initiated a projected called 'budgeting for results'. Under this scheme, the output and performance targets for each administrative unit are outlined beforehand. This then determines the administrative unit's respective budget. The unit is then required to remain within that budget, but any savings they built up over the course of that year carries through to the next fiscal year. The ministers and departments are given considerable freedom in the running of their units in exchange, once more, for greater accountability (Lee and Haque, 2006). The Singaporeans have in essence transformed their bureaucracy into a business with financial incentives for efficiency. Furthermore, the Singaporean bureaucracy is closely linked with the political, administrative and economic spheres. Sometimes termed a politico-administrative regime, the civil services often serve as a prime recruitment ground for the political arena (Lee and Haque, 2006). In this system, significant power was purposefully allotted to the bureaucracy. The notion was, while the government was run by the politicians and the administrators, the bureaucracy who is shielded

from politics and ideology should retain significant amounts of power (Barr, 2006). The Singaporeans have in essence attempted to remove politics from governance. Many countries struggle because the two, governance and politics, are so tightly intertwined. However, this is not to say that the politicians are not involved with the government. They have a proactive and managerial role (Barr, 2006). A delicate balance must be reached where both are involved, the bureaucracy which carries out the activities and the managerial politicians.

## **Social Sphere**

Singapore's approach to social welfare differs vastly from its equally developed counterparts in the West. While in Europe welfare is often seen as a social right, this premise is rejected in Singapore. Although the country does not deny its citizens welfare, it believes in self-reliance and familialism over state welfare (Lee and Haque, 2006). Although the government does not see welfare as a right, it does provide their citizens with some form of assistance in the form of the Central Provident Fund or CPF. Participation in the system is mandatory for all working Singaporeans (Conteh, 2010). The CPF consists for three different programmes which people buy into, a Medisave account, an Ordinary account, and a Special account. This system, started while Singapore was still under British rule in 1955, has since then been expanded. Both employees and employers are obligated to pay a fixed percentage into the CPF (Haque, 2004). The Medisave account acts as a health fund to cover health care expenses, the Ordinary account is often used to purchase houses, and the Special account is a retirement fund (Haque, 2004). Singapore's social policy also differs from their Western counterparts in the sense that the Singaporean government uses their policies to promote economic growth as well. The CPF has developed tremendously since its inception, it can now even be used to pay for education and invest in the equity market. Studies have revealed that the Singaporean public is very satisfied with their system, and in fact prefer it to a social insurance system of Europe. The system is not merely limited to a social system, the government also owns or constructs many of the houses. The government controls 80% of the middle income housing market. It is important to note that government housing does not hold the connotation it does in the West. Regardless of the government's dominant position in the market, home ownership was at 90% in 1995, but the

houses themselves were proximately built by the government. Thus, the Singaporean model does not perceive welfare to be a social right, instead the government acts more like a conduit and citizens along with their employers pay into a private fund which can later be used for a broad range of activities. The Singaporean government remains highly supportive hereof in part because it provides them with yet another tool to direct macroeconomic policy (Vasoo and Lee, 2001).

Another characteristic aspect of Singapore's social arena is its National Service (NS). All men who reach the age of 18 are required to enlist for NS, however, they must first register at the age of 16 and a half. They must serve in either the Armed Forces, Police Force, or the Vigilante Corps. This service shall not exceed 2.5 years. The Enlistment Act also dictates that men may service in a different force, body, or organization as the Minister sees fit (Enlistment Act, 2001). This obligation, in a unique manner, goes beyond Singaporean nationals. All second generation males who hold permanent residency are also subject to National Service. Individuals who do not fulfil their obligation will be subject to a fine up to 10,000 Singaporean dollars and/or up to 3 years in prison. Individuals holding a permanent residency can renounce their status to avoid the NS, but in doing so, their return to the country, studying, or working in Singapore can be made considerably more difficult (Singapore Government, 2013). The Enlistment Act under article 21 does provide employment protection for individuals who are forced to leave paid employment due to their NS obligations (Enlistment Act, 2001). The Vigilante Corps is an official body whose prime objective is to support the police. They share the same objective; the maintenance of law and order, and they support the police in the manners in which they can, but they remain an independent entity (Vigilante Corps Act, 1987).

Singapore's strict social control does result in a safe society. Singapore is ranked among the countries which have the lowest crime rate (OSAC, 2013). As with any state, despite their low crime rate, they continue to fight against it. In 2013, reported crime dropped by 4.3%. This drop occurred in all categories apart from violent property crimes and commercial crimes. Youth crime in Singapore also witnessed a staggering 10.1% decline over the course of a year. Despite this relatively promising outlook, cybercrime is on the rise (Singapore Police Force, 2014). An important addendum is that the state has a strict enforcement on firearms (OSAC, 2013). On the other end of the spectrum, Singapore also employs strict judicial enforcement. Although

Singapore ensures the rights to certain freedoms; expression, peaceful assembly, and association, the government does impose limits for the purpose of public order, security, morality, and internal harmony. An association of more than ten people for example, requires approval (Human Rights Watch, 2014). In the U.S. much criticism was raised in regard to the Patriot Act and the other National Security Acts which followed in the wake of 9/11. However, Singapore also plays host to restrictive legislation. The Internal Security Act for example, allows for the arrest and detention of suspects without warrant or trial. Some authors go so far as to claim that coercion is one of the pillars of PAP's dominance in Singapore (George, 2007). The Internal Security Act, originally adopted in 1960, is a remnant of Singapore's time under British rule (Internal Security Act, 1987).

While there is no indication that the Act will be withdrawn, Singapore did take steps towards reforming its judicial system. Judges were granted the right to use more discretion in issuing punishments to individuals for certain crimes. Furthermore, while Singapore is one of the few countries which still sanctions the death penalty, 2012 did witness some of these sentences commuted. Moreover, judges are now no longer obliged to universally impose death sentences on cases concerning drugs and may instead commit low-level offenders to life imprisonment. Canning, a form of punishment the West has often criticized Singapore for, continues to be used. A form of corporal punishment, it is used on medically fit males between the ages of 16 and 50 for various crimes including rape and drug-trafficking (Human Rights Watch, 2014).

One arena in which Singapore has not made much progress is LGBT rights. Sexual acts between men remains criminalized for instance. Furthermore, the Media Development Authority issued bans on certain Western websites for 'advocating homosexuality or lesbianism'. However, there is a relatively large community in Singapore which is trying to bring about reform. An example is the Pink Dot pride festival. A LGBT rights movement, this annual event draws in large corporate sponsors and was attended by approximately 20,000 individuals in 2013 (Human Rights Watch, 2014).

### **The Singaporean Model**

Singapore developed in a method which is unique to a small group of countries often referred to as Newly Industrialized Countries (NIC). Also a member of the Asian Tigers, Singapore

managed to rapidly develop but under the firm and guiding hand of a strong central government. The PAP reformed the country and its economy after removing the entrenched power structure with support from foreign capital and internal support. Without both factors, success would not have been assured. The most difficult of these, continued and sufficient foreign capital would only be possible if the state or corporation were to benefit. Thus, finding foreign sponsors to help bankroll a structural reform would pose a major challenge. This would become more so the larger and more populous the proposed country were. Singapore's success is inextricably linked to its economic development and developmentalist mentality. Thus, the Singaporean model would have to be severely adjusted were it to be applied to a country which already has reached a certain level of economic potential, unless they were willing to start from scratch. In any case, the exact development approach taken by Singapore cannot be used in another country. The model will require some adaptation based on local culture and circumstance. There is no one size fits all approach.

Beginning with Singapore's economic policies, a state lead economy with considerable government steering is a tried and true approach in economic development. Many countries in the global south employ such a strategy. Singapore sets itself apart by creating a very investor friendly environment. This approach does open the possibility for foreign exploitation of domestic resources. Singapore was spared this horror by virtue of its limited natural resources. This forced investors to develop the country, not merely strip it in a practice of 'exploitation colonialism' or 'exploitation capitalism'. Singapore's lack of natural resources also pushed it to develop its human resources to make it more investment friendly, an impetus which other developing states lacked. This helped Singapore's development as it provided it with an educated labour force to move beyond simple manufacturing and other sectors. However, providing education for large portions of the population, although possible, is very difficult without significant foreign investment and strong government oversight. A country must provide a means of transportation to the schools, school materials, food, quality teachers, and safety. Thus, the viability of such a system depends on the pre-existing conditions in a country, however, it would in most cases still remain a challenge. Thus, from an economic standpoint, mimicking the Singaporean model will be very difficult. However, the strategy of strong government steering is

viable. Under the right conditions, notably the absence of corruption, in itself a herculean task, state lead economic growth can greatly help state development in other aspects as well.

The Singaporean political sphere can best be described as limited in the interest of state security. The prospect of a merit based technocracy seems like a viable approach to governing a state. However, as with all forms of governance it possess its own challenges, notably an educated population. Aside from the logistical challenge, such a system might lead to a situation where a country is ruled by an ‘old boys club’ or becomes reminiscent of Plutocracy or Cronyism. The challenge is ensuring sufficient fluidity and transparency at the upper levels of governance so that it does not simply look like a democratically elected government but also acts like one. It is important to note, that in most cases when individuals refer to Western states as democracies, they imply that the means by which individuals are elected are democratic.

This paper is presenting a Western bias where the assumption is that of Winston Churchill, “democracy is the worst form of government except all the others that have been tried” (Churchill, n.d.). While many in the West might want developing states to become regimes with democratically elected representatives, a strong government can help in the early stages of development. Furthermore, Singapore’s approach to ensuring minority representation is admirable and should be adapted in any country which was to attempt to adapt the Singaporean model. Moreover, Singapore’s use of first-past-the-post ensures that a dominant party emerges without the need for coalition building. That being said, it results in a considerable amount of lost votes.

Singapore’s approach to democracy is a viable approach for transitional democracies. It allows for strong government and democratic institutions to emerge. If one party remains dominant, as PAP in Singapore, not only will institutional memory remain, but long-term policy planning becomes more viable. Thus, this approach can be used to develop the needed democratic institutions and trust within a society before one were to transition into a more free and representative democracy.

Singapore’s judiciary on the other hand leaves something to be desired. Any country adopting the Singaporean model might use their approach to governance with a strong bureaucracy to ensure efficiency, but a strong independent judiciary is required to keep the

government in check. This is especially important if the government is entrusted with extra authority or if their rule is all but ensured. While Singapore does not witness an abundance of abuse of power, this might not be the case for other countries. Lastly, a country's social arena is highly differentiated and dependent on cultural and local conditions so that any model should be careful in approaching it. Thus, this paper will make no recommendations on the matter aside to say that a strong government presence in either the Western or Singaporean approach can be valuable if applied well.

Thus, while Singapore's model proves to be very effective for the country itself, were any other country to attempt it, the model would have to be significantly altered to tailor not only to their needs but also to the context. That being said, owing to the fact that much of Singapore's success stems from the great economic growth which it experienced under the PAP's leadership which was the result of PAP's cooperation with the foreign community, it seems hard to replicate such a result. The international community has changed much since then. Furthermore, the lack of exploitable materials, by either foreign or domestic leaders also prevented Singapore from falling into many development traps other countries faced. Singapore found itself in a unique set of circumstances which allowed it to undertake its path. A set of circumstances which are neigh impossible to replicate in other states. Based on these crucial elements which defined Singapore's development, it is the conclusion that a so-called 'Singaporean model' cannot be exported.

However, a model based on developmentalism and strong government leadership can be implemented elsewhere. This would be a viable approach to bringing about social and economic development. The manner in which Singapore applied democracy, strong leadership and minority representation, can be used as an example for transitional democratic systems. On the economic front, Singapore stands as an example that rather than relying solely on laissez-faire economics, government driven and lead economics is a viable approach to establishing and developing a state's economy. Thus, while a Singaporean model would not be applicable to a third state, elements of the Singaporean governance can be used. Ideally, Singapore's efficient governance model could be mimicked, but it is more realistic that Singapore's approach to government lead economics and strong leadership under a democratic regime is replicated. Exporting this model will pose its difficulties and it will require 'checks and balances', but it is a viable attempt at development which has shown promise.

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