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Chapter Author(s): Syed Muhd Khairudin Aljunied and Derek Heng

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1 Globalising the History of Singapore

Syed Muhd Khairudin Aljunied & Derek Heng

World studies, which are more commonly referred to now as global studies, have become an increasingly important field of study, both in the social sciences and humanities since the early 1970s. Beginning with discussions among economists and political scientists who sought to reconceptualise distributive and interactive dynamics between states and societies located in different parts of the world at the height of the Cold War, the boundaries of global studies have since widened as they gained the attention of geographers and sociologists in the final decades of the twentieth century. Their contribution to the institutionalisation of global studies in academia has mainly involved fresh approaches that enhance our understanding of the often unequal relationships between developed and developing countries. Keywords such as "interactive zones", "world systems" and "free markets" have become indispensable in any discussion about the world as a whole. The justification for the need to develop new vocabularies, promulgate new generalisations and invent new methodologies lay primarily in the assumption that humankind was facing "globality" and "globalisation", a condition and a process whereby traditional boundaries of space, knowledge and power are broken down, compressed, and intensified, by the advancement of information and transportation technology.

Where do scholars of the humanities fit into these developments? Historians in particular had a great deal to contribute to global studies, both as an academic discipline and as a subject of wider general interest after the Second World War. Historical monographs that sought to explain the evolution of human societies from earliest times up to the advent of modernity had long preceded the social sciences. Works such as William McNeill's *Rise of the West* (1963) and Marshall Hodgson's three-volume *The Venture of Islam* (1974) quickly come to mind. These two books represented a new wave of scholarship aimed at decentering the cyclical models of human development that had earlier been developed by Oswald Spengler and Arnold Toynbee. And yet the global perspectives that characterised these writings were quickly overshadowed by the pertinent concerns of the time. The dismantling of empires, the creation of new states and the outbreak of revolutions and insurgencies across the globe called for more formulaic, if not social scientific, approaches

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to understanding societies. Hence, McNeill's magnum opus was to give way to Immanuel Wallerstein's macroscopic study of modern capitalism; Hodgson's appeal for an inter-regional perspective to offset Eurocentrism in global studies did not gain the attention it deserved until the coming of the Saidian anti-Orientalist critique (Said 1978). And it was only with the end of the Cold War that a change in academic praxis was ushered in, as discussions about the validity of past models and theories began to emerge in the social science circles and the work of global historians regained its much neglected importance. To understand the extensive effects and drastic changes wrought by modern-day globalisation and to give future generations an entirely new set of scholarly options, earlier patterns of global interactions became the subject of scholarly scrutiny approached in a more historically and empirically grounded way.

So what has emerged from this new wave of scholarship? Essentially three different modes of approaching, narrating and teaching global history. The first mode conceived global history as an extension of the study of Western civilisation. The fundamental theme such studies share is the rise of Europe as a world power. Appended to this master narrative are the roles and contributions of non-European states and polities in creating the conditions for Western hegemony in world affairs. The second mode aimed at decentering Europe's importance by giving more prominence to contemporaneous nations and civilisations. Here, Europe was portrayed as an equal competitor with other nations and civilisations in the struggle for primacy and survival within a global context. A recent variant of this mode tries to break down accepted ideas of nations, civilisations and the self to create more scope for 'cross-cultural' identifications and exchanges as well as overlapping boundaries. The third and perhaps most radical mode acknowledged the existence of nations and civilisations, while seeing these imagined spaces as mere nodes within intersecting political, economic and ideological systems that defined the course of humanity. Not ignoring the forces at play in local settings, this mode of representing global history sought to establish causal relationships between the structures and strictures of everyday life and patterns at more systemic levels, such as the flows of knowledge, capital and labour within a globalised economy (Dirlik 2005, 394).

This is, of course, not the place to discuss in detail the usefulness of each of these ways of approaching global history. However, one implicit feature that links all of these approaches is the prevalence of Eurocentrism and its attendant presuppositions. The notions of space, as a case in point, are unceasingly laden with assumptions that are inherent in western historiography. This can be seen in the consistent reliance on what Marshall Hodgon has termed a "Jim Crow world map", which is a projection of the "western image of the world". By placing Europe at the upper centre of the map and by assigning the land area the status of

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a "continent", Europe appears to be "far larger in scale than the Middle East, China and India" (Hodgson 1994: 4-6). Europe then becomes a 'core entity' that had the upper hand throughout the march of modern history. The consequence of taking this perspective is to view and narrate global history, even in its most sophisticated form, around key themes such as the rise and decline of pre-modern empires, trans-regional socio-economic interactions, the onset and impact of European colonialism from the late fifteenth century onwards, decolonisation and the challenge of globalisation, as well as postcoloniality (Lockard 1995: 7-35). And, because of the continuing sway of such telos and paradigms, a sense of the universal applicability of concepts derived from the European experience to explain developments emerged across the globe (Fernandez-Armesto: 2006).

It is in the face of these trends and problems facing the field of global history that this volume was conceived. Southeast Asia's unique location at the interstices of the Indian Ocean, South China Sea and the Pacific Rim, the rapid flows of migrants and the movement of goods and natural resources in and out of the region necessitate, in our view, the employment of global history as a method for exploring and explaining continuities and transformations in the region. Indeed, over the past few decades, something fascinating has been taking place in Southeast Asian history. Once entrenched within the 'country' and 'nation-state' paradigms, the field has been challenged both by established specialists and new interlocutors, armed with fresh and often powerful global perspectives. Because of these new developments, Southeast Asian scholars have been forced to rethink, and at times to even abandon, their previous assumptions about the region's impact on the world and about how the world has shaped the region's tangled pasts. Scholars such as Wang Gungwu, Reynaldo Ileto, Benedict Anderson, Anthony Reid, James Scott, Victor Lieberman, Craig Lockard and Engseng Ho loom large in current attempts to look at Southeast Asian pasts through new global spectacles. The long-term implication is the widening of the scope of global history towards incorporating uncharted geographical spaces, enabling new modes of enquiry and rethinking long-held ideas of nationhood and regionalism.

Engseng Ho's *The Graves of Tarim* (2005), for example, deserves some elaboration here, as it has important methodical implications for the study of Southeast Asian pasts within a global historical perspective. Taking as its axis of analysis the tombs and shrines of the Hadrami Arabs, the book demonstrates the intertwined histories of people and places, of individuals and social collectives, texts and material remains located across the Arab World, South Asia and Southeast Asia. By grafting the fates and fortunes of a diasporic community – the Hadramis – within a global historical framework and devising new conceptual tools for discussing Southeast Asian experiences vis-à-vis the wider world, Engseng

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Ho has questioned the preponderance of the nation and its imagined borders within any unit of analysis. New ways of illustrating connectedness, convergences and parallels rather than variances and specificities – across oceans and continents – have sprung forth from this acute analysis of the trans-regional or internationalism that shaped the contours of the identity, politics, culture and ideas of a people in Southeast Asia. In that regard, Southeast Asian studies have a lot to offer to the global history discourse. By locating Southeast Asia in global history, which Engseng has eloquently done, we may at the same time rectify the undue relegation of the region to second-tier status in terms of academic importance – a phenomenon that is ubiquitous within academic circles in North America, China and even India.

It is in the light of such innovations in the wider Southeast Asian scholarly literature that the case for reinterpreting Singapore's past in global history can best be made. Although diminutive in size, the island's unique location at the southern end of the Straits of Malacca and midway between the Indian Ocean and South China Sea has made it a crucial site for contestations, negotiations and adaptations among a number of European and Asian powers, all of which were connected since pre-historic times through trade and migration (cf. Abu-Lughod 1989 & Chaudhuri 1990). And, as the world became increasingly and intensively connected from the late fifteen century onwards with the advent of European colonialism, networks emanating into and out of Singapore were enlarged to include remote parts of North-east Asia, Australasia, the Mediterranean, the Pacific Rim, and West and North Africa. To be sure, these connections had implications for Singapore as had the island on the rest of the world. Put differently, the complex interplay of global and local developments in Singapore were in many instances moulded into new forms and relayed back to affect the larger external world. Charles Tilly's analogy of a flood to explain the outbreak of revolutions is instructive in this regard (Tilly 1995). Several historical factors contribute to the occurrence of floods and, although these factors are often unrelated or, in their own terms, non-threatening, their confluence within a particular place at a particular time may result in the outbreak of major floods, or within the scope of Tilly's research, revolutions. The arena in which a variety of factors converge to provoke a flood could be likened to that of Singapore. While being shaped by global factors and developments from the tenth to the twenty-first centuries, Singapore's unique location has made the island a strategic launch-pad for individuals, organisations, polities and state machineries to influence, or at the very least, to predict major occurrences in the world.

In articulating a history of Singapore from a global perspective, it is also important to recognise that there are essentially two audiences that such an endeavour could address: the wider academic world and a domestic

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audience in Singapore and in Southeast Asia. With regards to the former, there are several reasons why such historical enquiries are important. Approaching Singapore from a global perspective would contribute to current developments in historical research, especially in the areas of identity formation and mobility across borders. Studies on the nature of the society, economy and politics in Singapore from a global perspective would open up new vistas for improving our understanding of other areas such as economic networks and business history, diasporic studies, as well as imperial, colonial and post-colonial regime change. Such contributions would no doubt be significant in the larger scheme of things.

The most important contribution has taken place in the field of city-state studies. In his recent seminal two-volume work, Victor Lieberman aptly demonstrates how analytical models of social and state developments that are derived from Mainland Southeast Asian experiences may be applied to further our understanding of such developments in such diverse localities as northern Europe, the Caucasus, China and Japan, by including such global factors as climate and disease, as well as assumed human commonalities such as the development of cultural singularities (2003 & 2009). While Lieberman's work centres on agrarian states with substantial populations, this volume is an attempt to serve as a counterpoint, by interrogating nodal centres without extensive geographical or social hinterlands. In this regard, there are a number of regions in the world that share similar geographical, demographic and economic similarities with Singapore, including the Gulf of Mexico, the Arabian Sea, and the north China Sea, to name but three. A study of Singapore in global history could potentially serve as a basis for comparison by other historians working on the ebb and flow of city states. More to the point, in a world that is no longer confined to a bi-polar super-power order, but increasingly dominated by multinational corporations and a plethora of new post-colonial states, each with varying strategic significance, a study of Singapore as a city-state that was able to maintain a pre-eminent position throughout modern history would be an important step on the path towards questioning the current accepted narratives of global history. The core or dominant-centre perspective that is evident in the works of Ross Dunn (1985), Immanuel Wallerstein (1974), and Laura Benton (1996) could be redeveloped or even substantially revised. As a city-state well plugged into global historical experience, Singapore defies the argument that there was once a dominant European force that determined the dynamics of interactions between the core and periphery, as well as within the periphery itself. Rather, what comes out of all of the papers in this volume is a reinterpretation of what is assumed to be a periphery. In many ways, Singapore had established itself as a *crucial* centre within multiple and expanding global systems. The significance of this book is thus much wider than its title may at first sight suggest.

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Above and beyond academic concerns, global history as a framework for understanding Singapore's history is edifying as it addresses a changing domestic audience. As one of the contributing authors of this volume has correctly observed, the nation-state and 'big man' approaches to history appear no longer to be acceptable to today's Singaporeans. There seems to be an increasing desire among young and old in the country, as in Southeast Asia at large, to incorporate the collective social memories of the people into the official narrative. Alternative stories that go beyond great achievements of the founding fathers of the nation-state in the early years of decolonisation are being sought. Such new conceptions of the past are particularly pressing and relevant for nation-states that are currently affected by the wave of consumerist globalisation, changing social demographics, and economies that are overwhelmingly kept alive by migrant labour. We are compelled to conclude that a global mode of enquiry is indispensible for understanding the local. In this regard, global history, for these states and societies, is not merely an attempt at providing alternative narratives, but, as William Robinson observes:

> Without understanding the existence of societies prior to the emergence of the nation-state, nation-states cannot be understood as isolated social systems under the assumption of a transhistoric symmetry between nation-states and social structure that rules out by ontological assumption and methodological fiat the study of social structure that is truly supra- or transnational in character. (1998: 566)

It is important to bear in mind that ultimately it is not so much the notion that the official and nation-centred narratives are irrelevant, but that there needs to be a recognition of multiple narratives that should be accorded equal importance and attention. Even though each of these narratives is distinct, they exist in tandem with one another in a given historical timeframe. It is therefore not just the notion that a more coherent picture may therefore be developed when these narratives, like horizontal templates, are compressed vertically, but that each of these templates need to be understood and studied in their own right to complement and even interrogate the national narrative. In other words, these narratives should be interwoven to create an interactive historiographical dynamic that is distinct from the nation or country-centred historiographical trends in Southeast Asia, which are often saturated with teleological narratives.

Indeed, the teleologies, which largely centre on notions of innovation and change as well as development and progress under the auspices of the colonial and, in the post-1965 era, the post-colonial nation-state, have been projected back into the nineteenth and early twentieth century, and to an extent into the earlier, pre-modern history of Singapore. In particular,

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the focus has been on Singapore's commercial success and development as a major entrepot in the region, first under British rule, and then as a city-state after 1965, with the colonial period as the foundation and precursor for its post-colonial success. This success story has also been cast as a unique history vis-à-vis the experiences of the surrounding region. Such a narrative relies heavily on the core-periphery model developed by urban geographers and macro-economists working on such regional and global issues as trans-border labour movements, capital flows and macro-level vertical economic integration models, including those put forward by Saskia Sassen (1988), Yeung Yue-Man and Lo Fu-Chen (1996), and Scott MacLeod T.G. MacGee (1996), which locate Singapore in a semi-peripheral space or at best as a secondary centre.

This volume, which is entitled *Singapore in Global History*, is a departure from both the teleological narrative of the successful nation-state that has hitherto been propagated internally and the location of Singapore in the semi-peripheral space in the larger global discourse that has been generated externally. Initiated by two historians based at the National University of Singapore and Ohio State University in the USA, this book, the content of which was partly presented at the International Convention of Asian Scholars (ICAS) in South Korea in the summer of 2009, consists of twelve papers spread across a broad chronological period and range of topics, bringing together scholars working in the fields of political science, international relations, history, sociology, literature, art history and architecture to explore ways in which Singapore's history could be examined from a global perspective. The volume makes a collective attempt at arguing in a radically different fashion that Singapore should be conceived as both core *and* periphery and that the logic of Singapore's success based primarily on the roles of big men and strong states is far from adequate. By locating the island as a central space between the major termini of maritime Asia and the world, Singapore comes out strongly in this volume as a location where global processes find their nesting place and where the roots of transformative processes that eventually emanated to other faraway parts of a globalising world could be traced. By adopting these new lenses, it becomes clear that states and organisations, elites and subalterns, and texts and other communicative media, have all added to the making of Singapore and the making of the globe of which Singapore is a constitutive part.

In the paper entitled "Situating Temasik within the Larger Regional Context: Maritime Asia and Malay State Formation in the Pre-Modern Era", Derek Heng argues that instead of taking the traditional view of the genesis and formation of a polity in the coastal Malay region as a consequence of human agency, abetted by the ability of the political progenitors to attract trade and people to settle at the newly founded port-city, the framework of analysis should be shifted towards the role of regional

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and international forces. By re-examining the history of state formation in the Malay region and its accompanying political, social and economic developments in the Indian Ocean South China Sea, Gulf of Siam and Java Sea region, Heng advances the point that even though states and port polities were dependent on human capital to ensure their sustenance, it is ultimately the prevailing external forces and circumstances that determine the nature of these entities within the Malay region. In that regard, Temasik, the port polity that existed on Singapore Island during the fourteenth century and which was active for only a little over a hundred years, serves as a prime example of the way in which the vicissitudes of a Malay port city almost entirely depends on the circumstances generated by external forces.

Following the same line of argument, Joey Long's paper, entitled "Bringing the International and Transnational Back In: Singapore, Decolonisation, and the Cold War", demonstrates the ways in which the strategic policies of the British government and the United States of America (USA) have had a direct impact on the fortunes of political parties, social movements, right down to individual personalities, in Singapore in the immediate aftermath of World War Two and, more so, in the period following the Suez Crisis in 1956. By supporting anti-communist regimes and non-leftist political parties in Southeast Asia, both Britain and the USA have determined the course of Singaporean history and the lives of prominent political individuals in ways that would only become visible to us when the archives in both countries are mined extensively and fresh questions about the roles of great powers are asked. As it stands, much of the historical writing on Singapore has made questions about global influences secondary to the celebration of the local.

Even so, it is equally important to recognise that the unfolding of events in Singapore has had regional and international ramifications. The task of situating Singapore within a global framework need not entail a conception of the island as merely a recipient of international forces and influences, but also as a source which made global events possible. Syed Muhd Khairudin Aljunied paper, entitled "The Global Effects of an Ethnic Riot: Singapore, 1950-54", observes that while scholarship on riots and rebellions in British colonial territories in Southeast Asia has, to a large degree, been dominated by the study of the causes, development and eventual suppression of these violent forms of popular resistance as seen through the lenses of national histories. Very little attention has been paid to investigating the effects and consequences of mass violence in a given setting, particularly during the period of decolonisation. His paper fills the lacunae in the available historical literature by exploring the global effects of the Maria Hertogh riots in colonial Singapore. He shows how news agencies and politicians in England reacted to the events that unfolded in the aftermath of the riots and brings to light the diplomatic

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fissures and tensions that developed between British and Dutch officials, as well as their Australian, American and Muslim counterparts as a result of the riots. By extending Tony Ballantyne's conception of the British Empire as "a complex web consisting of 'horizontal' filaments that run among various colonies in addition to 'vertical' connections between the metropole and individual colonies", Syed Muhd Khairudin Aljunied demonstrates that both the horizontal filaments and the vertical connections of the British Empire proved to be vital in ensuring that there were swift reactions to the protests of the various parties who were involved in the riots. He also show that, paradoxically, in an age of decolonisation the communication links and political networks established by the British also functioned as avenues of resistance and critique for politicians in newly-independent countries, as well as anti-colonial activists and news agencies in Singapore and Britain itself.

One implication of Aljunied's study is that global history can serve as a vital link between imperial and nationalist historiographies in Southeast Asia, which have often been regarded in historiographical terms as being largely irreconcilable. Stephen Dobbs, in a chapter entitled "The Singapore River/Port in a Global Context" bridges imperial and nationalist historiographies by arguing that the raison d'être for the founding of modern Singapore in 1819 and its development through the nineteenth century was the changing global trading milieu in which the port of this tiny island – specifically the modern mega-port along the Singapore River – was to play a major role. The port of Singapore ranked as one of the busiest in the world, linking the island to the rest of the globe via a web of international maritime trade routes. While the modern state of Singapore has diversified its economic base significantly since becoming independent in 1965, the role of the port in the modern city state is still emblematic of Singapore's place in global history. He makes the observation that, from its modern origins, Singapore has been inextricably influenced by global trends and forces, particularly in the realms of trade and migration, while at the same time shaping them.

In the same vein, Loh Kah Seng's paper, entitled "The British Military Withdrawal from Singapore and the Anatomy of a Catalyst", attempts to address the rupture between imperial and nationalist histories by reassessing the accelerated British military withdrawal from Singapore, which has been cast as a defining event in most narratives of the 'ends of empire'. Britain's decision in 1968 to bring to a close its 'East of Suez' policy and run down its military presence in Singapore has often been held as evidence of the city-state's tangled place in imperial history, whereas in the nationalist narrative of newly independent Singapore's meteoric rise as an economic 'Asian Tiger' under the enlightened leadership of the PAP government in the 1970s, the British pullout has been cast as a "blessing in disguise". By approaching the withdrawal as a catalyst that

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not only enhanced Singapore's road to full industrialisation but also the state's efforts to socially engineer the citizenry, Loh's paper makes the argument that the Peoples' Action Party's efforts to convert the military bases, develop the industries, house the citizens, discipline the labour force, and socialise the youth were a continuation of measures introduced by the late colonial government after the Second World War in order to transform former colonies into viable nation-states. Alongside the colonial legacy which the PAP government inherited was the substantial assistance rendered by the British to ensure a successful withdrawal. Indeed, the post-war decolonisation and the military pullout that accompanied it – two sides of the same historical process – can only be properly understood if they are located at the interstices of nationalist and imperial histories.

Loh's paper, however, also demonstrates that the impact and ramifications of the global on the local, and vice-versa, can also be seen in the way that the international has had an impact on the experiences of individuals who were not necessarily of historically significance. His use of data from oral interviews with individuals from the lower strata of Singapore society, as opposed to significant individuals who tried to shape events in the immediate post-war and post-independence periods of Singapore's history, is an important contribution to integrating social historical methodology with global history.

The impact of the global on the local, and vice-versa, which are examined by Loh can also be seen in an earlier period – up to the Second World War – in the construction of an imperial order in Southeast Asia by the colonial powers on the one hand and negotiating pre-existing structures in the region on the other, with Singapore as the nexus where this mitigation process occurs. Huei-Ying Kuo, in her paper entitled "Social Discourse and Economic Functions: The Singapore Chinese in Japan's Southward Expansion between 1914 and 1941" argues that in the face of the decline of British imperial power and the rise of Japan in the South China Sea, the Chinese bourgeoisie in Singapore, as a leading business group in the region, adjusted their business strategies to accommodate changing political-economic structures. While the literature has emphasised how the leading Chinese bourgeoisie supported anti-Japanese boycotts to rescue their business interests, Kuo, basing her research on Japanese intelligence reports, British colonial archives, and newsletters of Chinese business associations, argues that the development of Chinese sub-ethnic, or dialect, cleavages in Singapore in the first half of the twentieth century reflected the diverging responses among the overseas Chinese to the gradual but evident shift in the balance of power in Asia.

The paper shows that as part of Japan's intention to compete with the British for the support of the Hokkiens, the most important Chinese business dialect group in Singapore, British Malaya and Indonesia at that

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time, Japan recruited Hokkien Chinese living in Taiwan, then a Japanese colony, to take charge of Japanese ad-hoc business organisations in preparation for eventual southward military expansion. This trans-regional collaboration, the use of ethnic proxies and courtship only came to a halt in 1928, when Chinese anti-Japanese feelings surged after the Jinan Incident in Shandong, China. The Japanese then shifted their efforts to securing economic collaborators among the Cantonese in Singapore and British Malaya. In the process, Japanese intelligence organs began to construct racial taxonomies to differentiate each major South Chinese dialect group, and this knowledge eventually became important for the formulation of plans to incorporate Singapore and British Malaya into the Greater East Asian Co-prosperity Sphere.

Kuo's paper reveals the vital roles that the Chinese in Singapore played in the realm of international trade and commerce, and why such analyses are indispensible in advancing our understanding of the dynamics of the economic interactions in East Asia and beyond. Traditionally, scholarship on this social group has focused on the nature of their commercial networks, social organisations, business models and socio-economic capital. This group has also been framed as peripheral, albeit important, to the key bastion of the East Asian economy – China – with terms such as "greater China" and "overseas Chinese" describing their wide-ranging activities. Counter to this grain, Jason Lim's paper, entitled "The Dynamics of Trans-Regional Businesses and National Politics: The Impact of Events in China on Fujian-Singapore Tea Trading Networks, 1920-1960" casts the Singapore Chinese tea merchants as managing to build up an important economic activity, encompassing the production, processing, packaging, shipping and trade of tea produced in Fujian, China, with Singapore as the apex of their commercial activities, in the face of the general decline of the trade in tea in China itself. Singapore's status as a commercial hub in East Asia and the congregation of Chinese merchants and coolies, or blue collar labourers, on the island, enabled the Chinese tea merchants to develop what may be regarded as a precursor of the metropolitan region concept of economic production and consumption that economists and geographers have recently coined and articulated in detail, as well as the commercial phenomenon of outsourcing that has come to characterise the way that businesses operate in today's globalised economy.

However, in case one is tempted to get carried away with the triumphant sentiments that both Kuo and Lim's papers conjure up in terms of the regional and global reach of Singapore's commercial and economic activities in the early twentieth century, Lim also demonstrates vividly the limits of the ability of Singapore's business community – and the island's society at large – to mitigate the economic policies of states in the region, and by extension the world. He deftly shows that the ability

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of the Chinese tea merchants to build up their tea production activities and trade ultimately rested on their ability to seek out and leverage the loopholes that the political state of affairs in China accorded. Changes in the state of politics, particularly in the South Chinese province of Fujian, ultimately determined the fortunes and success of the trans-regional business model. In that regard, Singapore, as a global city of trade, was ultimately subjected to the vagaries of global political and economic forces and the flow of ideas.

Undeniably, attempts to connect the ideas and discourses of individuals, institutions and interest groups to the global context represent a growing trend among Singaporean historians in recent years (Heng & Aljunied 2009; Kwa, Heng & Tan 2009). While the primary focus has been the policies that these various actors were responsible for and the international implications that their policies and actions had, very little scholarship has attempted to link their ideas and discourses with developments in the wider world. Moreover, the extent to which the backgrounds, personal experiences, memories and political posturing of selected individuals had in shaping their beliefs – and in turn public policies that had international implications – remained unexplored. Ang Cheng Guan's paper, entitled "The Global and Regional in Lee Kuan Yew's Strategic Thought: The Early Cold War Years" is possibly the first by a diplomatic historian to look closely at Lee's strategic thought and its evolution from 1965 to 1990, when he stepped down as the Prime Minister of Singapore. Ang argues that in his capacity as the nation's first and longest serving prime minister, Lee Kuan Yew had unparalleled influence over Singapore's foreign and security policies. And as one of the world's leading statesmen, he was known for his proclivity for *realpolitik* when deliberating the state of global and regional affairs. By critically examining the speeches and writings made by Lee over the course of the last five decades, Ang successfully reconstructs Lee's thoughts on the Indo-Malay world, the regional institutions of Southeast Asia, the Indochina War, and the roles of the major global powers at the height of the Cold War. Ang's analysis is acute and nuanced, i.e. he shows how events around the globe influenced Lee Kuan Yew's thinking about his own country.

While Ang's focus is on the ideas of one of Singapore's most influential politicians, who viewed its history through the lens of major events in the region and their implications, Leong Yew's paper, entitled "A Brief History of the Hub: Navigating between the 'Global' and 'Asian' in Singapore's Knowledge Economy Discourse" critically analyses the disjunctures between the Global and the Asian in Singapore's knowledge economy discourse, as manifested primarily in the policies and programmes of major institutions such as the National University of Singapore. Yew's narrative interrogates the attendant implications of the state's attempts to fashion itself as a broker of Asian knowledge in the global arena. He

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brings to the fore the new missions which Singapore's universities innovatively promoted and the attempts by knowledge brokers to couch all disciplines, regardless of their orientation, toward scientific universality with an 'Asian' tint. This movement towards producing Asian' forms of knowledge displays a great deal of tension and ambivalence *vis-a-vis* the realities of the globalised present. More often than not, the attempts by the state and its related institutions to couch all things as Asian, and hence less foreign, are riven by paradoxes and contradictions, with Singapore becoming increasingly dependent on global processes of knowledge capital accumulation.

The brokering of globalised knowledge with an Asian tint, however, is not confined solely to the current context; it was evident as early as the late nineteenth century, when Singapore was plugged into the global order established by the British Empire. The essays by Lai Chee Kien, Torsten Tschacher and Philip Holden examine imaginings of the 'global' in relation to developments at the local level through a number of publications and art works produced by various social groups in Singapore at different points in time. In so doing, they provide us with the roots to the current penchant for promoting a "globalised Asian" identity, be it cosmetically or in forms that reflect the self-identifications of the individuals, social groups or institutions involved.

In "Rambutans in the Picture: Han Wai Toon and the Articulation of Space by the Overseas Chinese in Singapore" Lai Chee Kien asserts that the new environments and identities of the diasporic Chinese may be understood through negotiations between the urban and rural, labour class and the literati, sub-tropical and tropical lands, ethnic and sub-ethnic communities, in order to create a particular overseas, but specifically southern Chinese, space. He marshals evidence from botany as an important and recurrent motif in shaping the literary, artistic and scholastic works of the overseas Chinese in Singapore, as well as the implications of this motif for identity construction. The Han Rambutan Orchard created by Han Wai Toon, a Hainanese who immigrated to Singapore in 1915, is but one example of this construction of overseas identity in life and in works of art.

Tschacher's "'Walls of Illusion': Information Generation in Colonial Singapore and the Reporting of the Mahdi-Rebellion in Sudan, 1887-1890" narrates the role of newspapers in Singapore as purveyors of the stories and developments in Egypt and Sudan which, interestingly, had an impact on public sensibilities about major events the world over. As he explains, the texture of news and views presented in the Tamil and Malay language newspapers not only depended largely on the various newspapers' links to the larger information order, but also on the re-representations of received news made by the Tamil and Malay newspaper editors themselves, for the consumption of their readerships in

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Singapore. Hence, while *The Straits Times*, which had direct access both to Reuter's telegrams as well as to occasional letters from correspondents in Cairo, tended to provide lucid yet unsensational coverage of the Mahdiyya revolt, the Tamil *Singai Nesan* attempted to redress the balance by tapping into other flows of information which would not have been as accessible to the English press. The same could be said in regard to the Malay Jawi, Arabic and Chinese newspapers, which drew on alternative repositories of information and opinion in order to promote their unique versions of these events that shook the Muslim World as they did Europe. More crucially, arguing in parallel to the explanations of Aljunied as discussed earlier on, Tschacher's paper highlights the dynamic exchanges that were taking place within the Singaporean public sphere and the connections with the wider world, thus rendering the island as one among many fertile sites through which global knowledge and information were relayed and broadcast.

Similarly, Holden's paper, entitled "The Littoral and the Literary: Making Moral Communities in the Straits Settlements and the Gold Coast in the late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century", examines the formation of identities and cultures and the ways in which these self-identifications were transmitted in writing during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, when knowledge and information were becoming more accessible especially to the literate elites in British colonies. This essay is important in another way in that it examines not just the Straits Settlements, but also elite self-constitution during a similar period in another British colony geographically remote from Singapore, the Gold Coast. Although located at opposite ends of the globe, the commonalities between these two places have been generally overlooked by area specialists and nationalist historians and this has implications for framing questions about the nature of colonial society. Holden thus breaks new ground by placing the texts produced in these two contexts within a single analytical framework. In reading the selected poems, biographical essays, and serialised fiction published in newspapers or magazines contrapuntally and highlighting the social and ideological contradictions embedded in them, Holden historicises the emergence of para-colonial elite discourses about the "moral community" that sought to challenge or even supersede the claims by states themselves at that time. In that sense, he has reinterpreted Singapore's historical pasts as one that traversed the same trajectory as Ghana, despite the dominant perception that these two colonies have had relatively distinct pasts.

Viewed as a whole, this volume corresponds to the vision that one of the doyens of global history, Jerry Bentley, has eloquently outlined: 'the need to globalize history and to historicize globalisation' (2006: 18). By globalising and reassessing the history of Singapore to include texts, events, processes and networks that had previously been conceived as

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either 'localised' or 'national' in character, what this volume seeks to achieve is to widen our understanding of the exogenous forces that have impacted the island and the endogenous variables that have made the island a site by which the world was coloured, shaped and transformed. Concomitantly and often obliquely, by historicising globalisation as a phenomenon that affected the world long before the coming of the digital age and McDonaldisation, each of the contributors to this volume has provided us with new insights into the dynamics of interactions and connections between the Southeast Asian region and the rest of the globe.

It is clear that the globalisation of Singapore and Southeast Asia as a whole had entirely different textures in the colonial and pre-colonial periods than those we see today. But underlying these surface differences are stark commonalities that came in the form of the movement of peoples, goods, cultures and ideas, which speak to the importance of this volume in deepening our understanding of the past and the present for the future.

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