

Human Geography : Singapore Perspectives

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Geography thrives by giving young minds the freedom to identify enigmatic questions and to seek answers. To ensure that curiosity is disciplined, the paradigms that have proved useful are taught to students, but always with the encouragement to challenge and innovate.¹⁾

I Introduction

Over the years, there have been several reflections of Singapore's Geography Department at the National University of Singapore²⁾ as well as updates on the Department's research output both in human geography³⁾ and physical geography⁴⁾. More recently, there has been also a gender perspective to the Department's faculty profile, student population and module offerings.⁵⁾

Keeping in mind these overviews of the Department and its research outputs, this paper will concentrate on the contributions of the Department in human geography over the last 15 years (1990 to 2005) by identifying the salient themes and research thrusts and highlighting the main contributions of faculty members. Human geography as opposed to physical geography, is a large template that covers a plethora of sub-disciplines in geography. It is defined here as the part of geography "concerned with the spatial differentiation and organization of human activity and its interrelationships with the physical environment"⁶⁾. This definition covers broadly the two conceptual themes that most human geographers anchor their work on: the human-nature relationships and the spatial organization of human activities. Given the large reservoir of publications that the faculty members have produced over the last 15 years, this review remains a personal reflection. I have also chosen to concentrate on the contributions of Singaporeans in

1) James, P. E. *All Possible Worlds : A History of Geographical Ideas*, The Odyssey Press, 1972.

2) See, (1) Ooi, J. B. *Peninsula Malaysia*, Longman, 1976. (2) Olds, K., 'Practices for 'process geographies' : A view from within and outside the periphery', *Environment and Planning D : Society and Space*, 19, 2001, pp. 127-136. (3) Savage, V. R., 'Changing geographies and the geography of change : some reflections', *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*, 24, 2003, pp. 61-85. (4) Teo, P. C. C., and Wong, P. P., 'Geography in Singapore', *The Professional Geographer*, 42, 1990, pp. 383-386.

3) See, (1) Cheng, L. K., 'The human geography of Singapore,' (Kapur, B. ed., *Singapore Studies : Critical Surveys of the Humanities and Social Sciences*, 1986), pp. 147-166. (2) Kong, L. L., and Savage, V. R., 'Human geography : a selective review', (Kapur, K. S. ds., *Singapore Studies : Critical Surveys of the Humanities and Social Sciences*, Singapore University Press, 1999), pp. 98-115.

4) Wong, P. P., 'Physical geography of Singapore : A selective review', (Kapur, K. S. ed., *Singapore Studies : Critical Surveys of the Humanities and Social Sciences*, Singapore University Press, 1986), pp. 167-181.

5) See, (1) Yeoh, B. S. A., Huang S. S. L., and Wong, T., 'Gender representation in geography : Singapore', *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, 28, 2004, pp. 121-131. (2) Yeoh, B. S. A., and Huang, S. S. L., 'Teaching gender (ed) values in Singapore', *International Research in Geographical and Environmental Education*, 9, 2000, pp. 71-74.

6) Johnston, R. J., Gregory, D., Pratt, G., and Watts, M. eds., *The Dictionary of Human Geography*, 4th Edition, Blackwell Publishers, 2000.

the Department because they reflect over the years, over 60 percent of the faculty in human geography. While there has been a dominant presence of foreign faculty in the Department they have remained a somewhat transitory population. This partly reflects the fact that for long, non-Singaporean faculty had difficulty taking up tenured appointments; the first time tenured positions were granted to foreign faculty in the Department was as recent as the 2005–06 academic year. However, where relevant, I will include the contributions of non-Singaporean faculty members in this review.

II NUS Geography: Explaining the Geographical Renaissance

If I were to classify the Department's history over its 75 year history (began teaching in 1929 in Raffles College), there are three periods that define Singapore's geography at tertiary level: i) the colonial foundations from 1929–1959; ii) independent period from 1960 to 1990; and iii) the post-colonial renaissance in geography from 1991 to the present. The colonial foundation of the Department was restricted mainly to establishing geography as a teaching subject. Only after World War II, the Department pursued a professional approach to the discipline, with the Head of Department having for the first time a Doctorate degree (Professor E. G. H. Dobby, PhD, University of London) and engaged in academic research besides teaching. The Department had mainly 'expatriate' faculty members⁷⁾ and many were research active. Under Dobby's headship for 11 years (1946–1957), human geography was focused on regional geography of Southeast Asia, Peninsular Malaya and Singapore which was generally field-work based research. The Department also inaugurated *The Malayan Journal of Tropical Geography* in 1953 and is still published today, continuously for the last 53 years.

The independent period of the Department approximates the beginning of self-rule (1959) from Britain and finally independence in 1963 (in Malaysia) and full independent sovereignty as a state in 1965. In 1960, the Department had its first Asian head (Professor Wikkramateleke) and this was followed subsequently by a series of Singaporean headships. This period still maintained a strong teaching tradition in the Department with research done more as a product of individual initiative than institutional encouragement. Under Ooi Jin Bee's headship (1969–1989), the Department remained stable and conservative in research and teaching. The well subscribed motto of this period was "don't rock the boat". Keith Buchanan, an external examiner (1967–1970) in the Department was less complimentary: he viewed the Department's courses as "reactionary and colonial"⁸⁾.

The third phase of the Department's history, a period that this paper is concerned with, is the most dynamic period in the history of the Department in many ways: teaching, research, publications, consultancies, government and non-government organisations (NGOs) participation, international and national academic contributions. To understand why the Department has gone through a renaissance requires an analysis of a series of contingent factors all coming together.

Firstly, the government's policies towards increasing the funding for research and development

7) *op. cit.*, footnote 1), 3).

8) *op. cit.*, footnote 1), 3).

greatly boosted university coffers and this had a trickle down effect on the Department both in terms of research funding and post-graduate expansion. The University according to former Deputy Prime Minister, Dr Tony Tan had moved from a teaching university to one that is research driven. This change in government policy led by the late 1990s to liberal research funds in the university. Secondly, the University underwent a major change in its overall academic system in 1994-95 switching from a British-based, year long, tutorial and examination based academic system to an American-type semester based, Continuous Assessment (CA) based grading system. The American system emphasized a 'no-walls education', less emphasis on examination assessments and more multi- and inter-disciplinary learning systems. Students were required to take more modules across various faculties and disciplines rather than concentrating narrowly in one major. Thirdly, the Department's first generation of Singaporean geographers (Ooi Jin Bee, Lee Yong Leng, Chia Lin Sien, Cheng Lim Keak and Teo Siew Eng) were all retiring by the late 1980s and early 1990s and a new generation of Singaporean geographers were filing their shoes. The new generation of geographers reflected a wider variety of sub-disciplines with higher degrees from a mixture of many universities in the Anglo-American world: Chang (tourism, McGill University), Huang (urban geography, University of Toronto), Kong (socio-cultural geography, University College, London), Raguraman (transport geography, University of Washington, Seattle), Savage (cultural, UC Berkeley), Teo (population geography, University of Pennsylvania), Yeoh (historical geography, Oxford University), Yeung (economic geography, University of Manchester) and the recent addition of Pow (urban geography, UCLA). Two other current graduate students will be joining the Department: Harvey Neo (environmental, Clark University) and Karen Lai (economic geography, University of Nottingham).

And fourthly, the increasing student enrolment in geography over the years allowed the Department an expansion of faculty members. This student increase was made especially possible because the university introduced two types of modules that required students to take in order to graduate: general education modules (GE modules) and Singapore Studies modules (SS modules), which were compulsory for students across faculties. Both these modules drew large numbers of students for geography. The SS modules had an enrolment over 400 students per semester per module; and these were offered over two semesters. These increased student numbers allowed for the hiring of many other young expatriate faculty (Tim Bunnell, Neil Coe, Carl Grundy-Warr, Lisa Law, Lee Yong Sook, Kris Olds, Park Bae-Gyoon, Martin Perry and James Sidaway) over the years who have helped to fertilize the research output in the Department.

Armed with new concepts, methods and themes from their postgraduate work, the return of young faculty to the Department served as a major catalyst for the Department in the 1990s onwards. There were many areas of research interest that were untilled by geographers and hence a flurry of research agendas ensued. In an interconnected world made possible by the information technology revolution in the 1990s or what Alvin Toffler⁹⁾ calls the Third Wave, the Department's human geographers connected amongst themselves with other faculty members in the university as well as geographers overseas.

9) Toffler, A. *The Third Wave*, Bantam, 1984.

The vitality of human geography in the Department over the last 15 years reflects to a large extent the productive research agendas and prolific publication output of three faculty members: Lily Kong, Brenda Yeoh and Henry Yeung. They served as the academic catalysts in the Department and through their never-tiring research agendas have helped to energize the Department's research programs. Lily Kong and Brenda Yeoh initiated their research paths with several joint publications¹⁰⁾ before they engaged several other faculty members in their publications.¹¹⁾ The last five years have seen a research coupling between Brenda Yeoh and Shirlena Huang¹²⁾ especially on migration and gender issues. Henry Yeung has done joint research with Singaporean faculty but his major research tie-ups has been with expatriate faculty members both at NUS and overseas.¹³⁾

Despite coming from different sub-disciplinary specializations in geography, the fecundity of joint research amongst faculty members has been made possible because of the broad interdisciplinary nature of certain research areas. In the Department, nearly all faculty members have engaged in three areas: tourism, globalization and socio-cultural geographical themes. These three themes have been the subject of Departmental organized conferences and workshops that have in turn been translated into edited books. Prime examples are *Globalisation and the Asia Pacific: Contested Territories*¹⁴⁾; *Interconnected Worlds: Tourism in Southeast Asia*¹⁵⁾ and *Asian Women as Transnational Domestic Workers*.¹⁶⁾

These systematic themes have been overlaid by the strong regional (Southeast Asia, East Asia) emphasis and specific local (Singapore) empirical embedding. The first level of empirical unfolding which represents probably 60 percent of all the faculty members' research output is Singapore. The state is expressed at various levels as nation-state, city-state, global city, urban landscape, circumscribed island and urban places. Each of these spatial depictions creates

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- 10) See, (1) Kong, L. L. L., and Yeoh, B. S. A., 'Urban conservation in Singapore: a survey of state policies and popular attitudes', *Urban Studies*, 31, 1994, pp. 247-265. (2) Yeoh, B. S. A., and Kong, L. L. L., 'Reading landscape meanings: state constructions and lived experiences in Singapore's Chinatown', *Habitat International*, 18, 1994, pp. 17-35. (3) Yeoh, B. S. A., and Kong, L. L. L. eds., *Portraits of Places: History, Community and Identity in Singapore*, Singapore Times Edition, 1995. (4) Yeoh, B. S. A., and Kong, L. L. L., 'The notion of place in the construction of history, nostalgia and heritage in Singapore', *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*, 17, 1996, pp. 62-65.
- 11) See, (1) Kong, L. L. L. and Chang, T. C. *Joo Chiat: A Living Legacy*, Didier Millet, 2001. (2) *op. cit.*, footnote 3) (2). (3) Yeoh, B. S. A., and Huang, S. S., 'Negotiating public space: Strategies and styles of migrant female domestic workers in Singapore', *Urban Studies*, 35, 1998, pp. 583-602. (4) Teo, P. C. C., and Yeoh, B. S. A., 'Remaking local heritage for tourism: Haw Paw Villa in Singapore', *Annals of Tourism Research*, 24, 1997, pp. 192-313. (5) Savage, V. R. and Yeoh, B. S. A. *Toponymics: A Study of Singapore Street Names*, Eastern Universities Press, 1st Edition, 2003, 2nd Edition, 2004.
- 12) See, (1) Yeoh, B. S. A., Huang, S., and Noor A. R., 'Asian women as transnational domestic women', (Huang, S., Yeoh, B. S. A., and Noor, A. R. eds., *Asian Women as Transnational Domestic Workers*, Marshall Cavendish Academic, 2005), pp. 1-17. (2) *op. cit.*, footnote 5) (1). (3) Yeoh, B. S. A., Huang, S. S. L., and Theresa, W. D., 'Diasporic subjects in the nation: foreign domestic workers, the reach of law and civil society in Singapore', *Asian Studies Review*, 28, 2004, pp. 7-23. (4) Yeoh, B. S. A., Teo, P. C. C., and Huang, S. S. L. eds., *Gender Politics in the Asia-Pacific Region*, Routledge, 2002.
- 13) See, (1) Yeung, H. W. C., and Olds, K. eds. *The Globalisation of Chinese Business Firms*, Macmillan, 1999. (2) Olds, K., Dicken, P., Kelly, P. F., Kong, L. L. L., and Yeung, H. W. C. eds., *Globalisation and the Asia Pacific: Contested Territories*, Routledge, 1999. (3) Yeung, H. W. C., and Dicken, P., 'Economic globalization and the tropical world in the new millennium: an introduction', *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*, 21, 2000, pp. 225-232. (4) Yeung, H. W. C., and Wang, J. H. J., 'Strategies for global competition: transnational chemical firms and Singapore's chemical cluster', *Environment and Planning A*, 32, 2000, pp. 847-869.
- 14) *op. cit.*, footnote 13) (1).
- 15) Teo, P., Chang, T. C., and Ho, K. C. eds., *Interconnected Worlds: Tourism in Southeast Asia*, Pergamon, 2001.
- 16) Huang, S., Yeoh, B. S. A., and Noor, A. R. eds., *Asian Women as Transnational Domestic Workers*, Marshall Cavendish Academic, 2005.

different identities, varied conceptual scalar levels of analysis, and multiple ways in understanding the way individuals and communities organize activities in space nationally and inter-relationally in the region and further away. At the intra-national level, Singapore geographers have often used 'landscape', 'place' and 'nature' (environment) as their defining conceptual theme for analysis¹⁷⁾. Landscape and place thus have featured as embeddings of national identity, Singaporean emotional attachments to places, ethnic identity, evocative symbols of nostalgia, expressions of home, national landmarks, tourism attractions, the existential areas of the elderly and zones for conservation¹⁸⁾. This focus on the Singapore landscape is also the binding theme of the Singapore Studies (SS) module for university students across faculties with its own home-grown textbook¹⁹⁾. At the extra-national levels, the academic interventions deal with more dynamic flows and processes arising from trade, finance, labor migrants, diasporas, industrial activities, information technology and tourism²⁰⁾.

At a second level of empirical analysis is the Southeast Asian region. The region might be viewed holistically as a geo-political territorial entity or as the 10 states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). But by and large, most of the studies have viewed the region in functional terms that underscores Michael Leifer²¹⁾ definition of functionalist activity as a "convergence of perceived interest underpinned by suitable political and economic circumstances". As opposed to the formal regional approaches that governed regional geography in the 1950s²²⁾, the Southeast Asian region has remained a functional template for all sorts of economic, social, cultural and political interactions by individuals, organizations, governments, communities and business corporations. Hence the studies of domestic maids in Southeast Asia reflects on the multiple interactions between out-sourcing places (the Philippines, Indonesia, Myanmar) and their in-source employers (Brunei, Singapore, Malaysia²³⁾). In the case of Henry Yeung's²⁴⁾ economic geographies of Hong Kong transnational corporations, the Southeast Asian

- 17) See, (1) Kong, L. and Yeoh, B. S. A. *The Politics of Landscapes in Singapore: Constructions of 'Nations'*, Syracuse University Press, 2003. (2) Kong, L., and Yeoh, B. S. A., 'The construction of national identity through the production of ritual and spectacle', *Political Geography*, 16, 1997, pp. 213-239. (3) Teo, P. C. C., and Huang, S. S., 'Tourism and heritage conservation in Singapore', *Annals of Tourism Research*, 24, 1995, pp. 589-615.
- 18) See, (1) *op. cit.*, footnote 10) (3). (2) *op. cit.*, footnote 10) (4). (3) Yeoh, B. S. A., and Huang, S. L. L., 'The conservation-redevelopment dilemma in Singapore: the case of Kampong Glam Historic District', *Cities*, 13, 1996, pp. 411-422. (4) *op. cit.*, footnote 5) (2). (5) Teo, P. C. C., Yeoh, B. S. A., Ooi, G. L., and Lai, K. P. Y. *Changing Landscapes in Singapore*, McGraw-Hill, 2004.
- 19) Teo, P. C. C., Yeoh, B. S. A., Ooi, G. L., and Lai, K. P. Y. *Changing Landscapes of Singapore*, McGraw-Hill, 2004.
- 20) See, (1) Tan, C. Z., and Yeung, H. W. C., 'The regionalization of Chinese business networks: a study of Singaporean firms in Hainan Province, China', *The Professional Geographer*, 52, 2000, pp. 437-454. (2) *op. cit.*, footnote 15). (3) Yeoh, B. S. A., and Huang, S. S. L., 'Spaces at the margin: migrant domestic workers and the development of civil society in Singapore', *Environment and Planning A*, 31, 1999, pp. 1149-1167. (4) Yeoh, B. S. A., and Willis, K., 'Singaporeans in China: transnational women elites and the negotiation of gendered identities', *Geoforum*, 36, 2005, pp. 211-222. (5) Yeung, H. W. C., 'Local politics and foreign ventures in China's transitional economy: the political economy of Singaporean investments in China', *Political Geography Quarterly*, 19, 2000, pp. 809-840.
- 21) Chin, K. W., and Suryadinata, L. eds., *Michael Leifer: Selected Works on Southeast Asia*, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2005.
- 22) Robequain, C. *Malaya, Indonesia, Borneo and the Philippines: A Geographical, Economic and Political Description of Malaya, the East Indies and the Philippines*, Longmans Green, 1958.
- 23) See, (1) *op. cit.*, footnote 16). (2) *op. cit.*, footnote 5) (2).
- 24) See, (1) Yeung, H. W. C. *Transnational Corporations and Business Networks: Hong Kong firms in the ASEAN Region*, Routledge, 1998a. (2) Yeung, H. W. C., 'Business networks and transnational corporations: a study of Hong Kong firms in the ASEAN region', *Economic Geography*, 73, 1997, pp. 1-25. (3) Yeung, H. W. C., 'The geography of Hong Kong transnational corporations in the ASEAN region', *Area*, 27, 1995, pp. 318-334.

region becomes the location for testing business entrepreneurship, Chinese business network relationships and the question of whether capitalism is culturally neutral.

Thirdly and more recently, the studies have engaged a broader spatial canvas to include the Asia-Pacific, Asia and East Asia²⁵⁾. Given the familiarity with Singapore's dominant Chinese population, the Department's faculty members certainly have an advantage of dealing with the dominant Chinese national entities of China, Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan as well as the overseas Chinese Diasporas in Southeast Asia. Henry Yeung's²⁶⁾ exposition on Chinese capitalism as "hybrid capitalism" demonstrates that capitalism is not culturally neutral. Indeed, it is this very nexus between economics and culture and economics and place embedding that has elevated economic geography discourses in mainstream economics and has given academic respectability to economic geography by peers from other disciplines. The economist, Jeffrey Sachs²⁷⁾ in his book, *The End of Poverty* underscores the importance of economic geography (location, place, natural resources, environmental issues) in understanding developmental processes and the reasons for poverty.

III Geographical Identity: the Geobody of Singapore's Research

The institutionalization of an academic discipline involves creating an identity, a subject with its own niche within the academic division of labour with which individuals are affiliated.²⁸⁾

Over the last 15 years (1990–2005), a voluminous amount of publications have emanated from the Department's eight Singaporean human geographers (T. C. Chang, Shirlena Huang, Lily Kong, K. Raguraman, Peggy Teo, Victor Savage, Brenda Yeoh, Henry Yeung) and one physical geographer who undertakes research in coastal tourism (Wong Poh Poh). The research output in the last 15 years covers 22 self / jointly authored books, 57 single / joint / multiple edited books, 620 international referred (IR) and regional referred articles, and 189 chapters in books. The IR articles cover most of the major journals in geography (*Area*; *Progress in Human Geography*; *Environment and Planning A*; *Geographical Review*; *Economic Geography*) as well as in allied fields in other disciplines (*Asian and Pacific Migration Journal*, *Cities*, *Woman's Studies International Forum*, *Asian Studies Review*, *Southeast Asian Studies*, *Annals Of Tourism Research*, *Transportation Quarterly*). The books (authored and edited) cover a range of publishing houses involving university presses as well as commercial publishing houses (Routledge, Edward Elgar, McGraw-Hill, Sage). But the number crunching statistics of the Department's publication output over the years, while impressive, is certainly not a major criterion of establishing the Department's research contributions. In an academic environment, where publications are a justification for tenure and promotions, the tragedy is that the traditional university ethos of intellectual debate and dialogue can sometimes be usurped.

Generally speaking, the competition amongst young academics has now been debased to the number of publications and books, the tiered ranking of journals published in and the quality of

25) See, (1) *op. cit.*, footnote 16). (2) *op. cit.*, footnote 12) (4).

26) Yeung, H. W. C. *Chinese Capitalism in a Global Era: Towards Hybrid Capitalism*, Routledge, 2004.

27) Sachs, J. *The End of Poverty*, Penguin, 2005.

28) Johnston, R. J. and Sidaway, J. D. *Geography & Geographers: Anglo-American Human Geography Since 1945*, Arnold, 2004.

the academic press one should use. But, the more important question is what about ideas? What about the debate on concepts and theories? In trying to deal with the plethora of publications of the Department, I have chosen to divide them under several themes. These themes in a way underscore the major research ideas and geographical thinking of the Department's faculty members.

Basically four broad generalizations can be made with regard to the Department's research work. Firstly, the main research themes revolve around each faculty member's sub-disciplinary research interest though there is some overlap of research interest amongst faculty members. Each faculty member has tended to remain the academic anchors in specific research areas or niche areas within sub-disciplines: for example T. C. Chang²⁹⁾ on tourism, Lily Kong³⁰⁾ on the geography of religion and popular music, Henry Yeung³¹⁾ on transnational corporations and Chinese business networks, and Peggy Teo³²⁾ on elderly population issues. Given the small size of the Department and the fact it represents the only academic geography department in the city-state, maintaining the diversity of systematic geographical traditions has remained a conscious policy to ensure at least the undergraduate students are exposed to a wide range of sub-disciplines in geography. However in research, the sub-disciplines have become blurred and there has been greater cross-fertilization amongst faculty members in their research agendas.

Secondly, research themes by and large reflect the nature of Singapore's geographicity which translates to the: changing nature of government policies, city-state identity, aging demographic profile, economic impetus, and wide-ranging national identity issues. It is thus no wonder that much of the research amongst Singaporean faculty remains very Singacentric in perspective. This Singapore research bias is contingent on two other factors. One is that unlike other nation-states, with numerous universities and geography departments, the Department of Geography in NUS is the only fully fledged geography department in Singapore. Unlike other states with hundreds of geographers and social scientists, in Singapore the human geography research lies essentially with the 8 to 12 human geographers (locals and expatriates) in the Department. And their portfolio of research agendas on Singapore is rather enormous. It is for Singaporean geographers to write about their national geographies before attempting to research and understand other regional geographies. Two, is the fact Singapore's rapid transformation as a relatively young nation (independent since 1965) from 'Third World to Developed'³³⁾ status in a matter of 40 years, provides

29) See, (1) Chang, T. C., 'Local uniqueness in the global village: heritage tourism in Singapore', *The Professional Geographer*, 51, 1999, pp. 91-103. (2) Chang, T. C., 'Renaissance revisited: Singapore as a 'Global City for the Arts'', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 24, 2000, pp. 818-831. (3) Chang, T. C., 'Configuring new tourism space: exploring Singapore's regional tourism forays', *Environmental and Planning A*, 33, 2001, pp. 1597-1619.

30) See, (1) Kong, L. L. L., 'Religion and technology: refiguring place, space, identity and community', *Area*, 33, 2001, pp. 404-413. (2) Kong, L. L. L., 'Religious landscapes', (Duncan, J., Johnson, N., and Schein, R. eds., *A Companion to Cultural Geography*, Blackwell, 2004), pp. 365-381. (3) Kong, L. L. L., 'Popular music in geographical analyses', *Progress in Human Geography*, 19, 1995, pp. 183-198. (4) Kong, L. L. L., 'Popular music in Singapore: exploring local cultures, global resources and regional identities', *Environment and Planning D, Society and Space*, 14, 1996, pp. 273-292.

31) *op. cit.*, footnote 24) (1).

32) See, (1) Teo, P. C. C., 'Is institutionalisation the answer for the elderly? The case of Singapore', *Asia Pacific Population Journal*, 7, 1992, pp. 65-79. (2) *op. cit.*, footnote 18) (5). (3) Teo, P. C. C., 'Health care for older persons in Singapore: Integrating state and community provisions with individual support', *Journal of Aging and Social Policy*, 16, 2004, pp. 43-67.

33) Lee K. Y. *From Third World to First The Singapore Story: 1965-2000*, Times Media Pte Ltd, 2000.

in itself a plethora of research agendas. The 'success' of Singapore's transformation is a 'black box' that elicits academic enquiry, critical reviews and simulated models for capacity-building.

Thirdly, the research themes reflect largely the changing concepts and -isms in Anglo-American geography. The unfortunate issue in publishing in the tier one, discipline-based academic journals is that contributors by and large have to follow the academic norms, concepts, nomenclature, and language of Anglo-American geography. Certainly, most of the Department's faculty members have been caught in the maelstrom of the globalization discourses, feminist geographies, post-colonial, modern, post-modern and neo-liberal deliberations. It would seem that each academic fetish and fad tends to engender a fresh reinvestigation and reinterpretation of existing spatial flows and processes.

And fourthly, as Singapore is a very small state, intellectual concerns in the social sciences in general have been focused on Singapore and the Asian region, in particular Southeast Asia. While American or British geographers engage in research in locations around the world, Singapore geographers or social scientists rarely embark on research matters that have nothing to do with Singapore and the Southeast Asian region. This geographic specificity provides an in-built academic niche that in some ways has determined the character of Singapore's human geography outputs. Singaporean geographers, in short, have become the authorities of the spatial and environmental relationships and ramifications within their own city-state and / or the inter- and extra- relationships in the Southeast Asian region or Asia-Pacific world.

(1) Singapore : Nation, city, and ecosystem

Singapore's geography output over the last 15 years can be characterized by a tremendous effervescence in discovering the changing and dynamic geographies of Singapore. The studies on Singapore cover essentially three slices of the Republic's geography. One body of work deals with the issue of Singapore finding its identity and footage as a nation-state. A second body of thought attempts to look at Singapore as a city with places of embedding community bonds, ethnic identity and nostalgic relationships. And a third body of literature looks at the dynamics of Singapore as an urban ecosystem, its urban sustainability, and its brown and green issues.

As a newly developed country (1965 independence), Singapore's national identity is the outcome of a wide spectrum of interventions. Hence the nation-state's identity filters through in national day parades³⁴⁾. The most ambitious attempt to examine national identity through landscape manifestations is *The Politics of Landscape in Singapore : Construction of 'Nations'*³⁵⁾. While other studies interrogate Singapore's urban status³⁶⁾, this study reflects on Singapore's national status and identity through discussion of four 'noneconomic landscape' themes : landscape of sentiment (places of worship, deathscapes), quotidian landscapes (housing and streets), landscapes of aesthetics (performance places) and landscapes of heritage (historic areas and symbolic icons). In analyzing these intersecting landscapes, they conclude that the Singapore "nation" is "socially and spatially

34) *op. cit.*, footnote 17) (2).

35) *op. cit.*, footnote 17) (2).

36) *op. cit.*, footnote 17) (2).

constructed, reinforced and challenged³⁷⁾. Their arguments and testimonies of a “nation” made “material, tangible” in “apparent” landscapes³⁸⁾, provide an alternative interpretation to a sociological undertaking of constructing the Singapore ‘nation’ and ‘national identity’³⁹⁾. Other studies tried to view national identity through Singaporean behavior overseas (China⁴⁰⁾). Based on her study of Singaporeans in China, Kong⁴¹⁾ argues that ironically transnational locations do enhance national identity and hence the ideas of territory are not a prerequisite for nationhood.

National identity and cultural identity, however, goes beyond landscape manifestations. Kong has examined the lyrics of Singaporean written songs to demonstrate varying identities of Singaporean artiste. Dick Lee, Singapore’s foremost songsmith, composes songs and musicals that reflect multiple cultural identities: local, pan-Asian pop identity and transculturation.⁴²⁾ Underscoring Singapore’s multi-cultural population, Kong⁴³⁾ argues that Lee’s music while reflecting “nationalistic pride” also demonstrates “a fusion of East and West and of local and global”. In her other body of cultural geography research Kong⁴⁴⁾ explores Singapore’s diverse religious beliefs and sacred landscape.

Singapore is essentially a city-state. Indeed, it is probably more difficult to compare Singapore with other developing states in the tropical world, than with making urban comparisons. As a relatively small city by global standards, its population of 4.3 million and its size of 699 sq km seem more like other cities. Yet qualitatively, the urban contextualizations have many incarnations. Singapore is defined as a city-state, and island-city,⁴⁵⁾ a global city,⁴⁶⁾ a garden city,⁴⁷⁾ a planned city-state⁴⁸⁾ a ‘model’ city,⁴⁹⁾ a cosmopolitan city,⁵⁰⁾ a Renaissance city,⁵¹⁾ a city-state of

37) *ibid.*, p. 211.

38) *ibid.*, p. 210.

39) See, (1) Hill, M., and Lian, K. F. *The Politics of Nation Building and Citizenship in Singapore*, Routledge, 1995. (2) Kuo, Eddie C. Y. ‘The making of a nation: cultural construction and national identity’ in (Chua, B. H. ed., *Communitarian Ideology and Democracy in Singapore*, Routledge, 1995), pp. 101–123. (3) Tamney, J. B. *The Struggle Cover Singapore’s Soul: Western Modernization and Asian Culture*, Walter de Gruyter, 1995.

40) Kong, L., ‘Globalisation and Singaporean transmigration: re-imagining and negotiating national identity’, *Political Geography*, 18, 1999a, pp. 563–589.

41) *ibid.*, pp. 563–589.

42) *op. cit.*, footnote 30) (4).

43) *ibid.*, p. 281.

44) See, (1) Kong, L. L. L., ‘Negotiating conceptions of ‘sacred space’: a case study of religious buildings in Singapore’, *Transactions, Institute of British Geographers*, 18, 1993, pp. 342–358. (2) *op. cit.*, footnote 30) (1). (3) Kong, L. L. L., and Tong, C. K., ‘Believing and belonging: Religion in Singapore,’ (Tong, C. K., and Chan, K. B. eds., *Past Times: A Social History of Singapore*, Times International Publishing, 2002), pp. 165–197.

45) De Koninck, R. *Singapore: An Atlas of the Revolution of Territory*, Reclus, 1992.

46) See, (1) Savage, V. R., ‘Landscape change: from kampung to global city,’ (Gupta, A. ed., *The Singapore Story: Physical Adjustments in a Changing Landscape*, Singapore University Press, 1992), pp. 5–13. (2) Savage, V. R., ‘Singapore as a global city: change and challenge for the 21st century,’ (Low, L. ed., *Singapore: Towards a Developed Status*, Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 140–169.

47) Savage, V. R., ‘Singapore’s garden city: translating environmental possibilism,’ (Ooi, G. L. and Kwok, K. eds., *City and the State: Singapore’s Built Environment Revisited*, Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 187–202.

48) Savage, V. R., ‘Singapore the planned city state: government intervention in nation building’ (Noble, A. G., Costa, F. J., Dutt, A. K., and Kent, R. B. eds., *Regional Development and Planning for the 21st Century: New Priorities, New Philosophies*, Ashgate, 1998a), pp. 307–331.

49) Savage, V. R., and C. P. Pow., ‘Model Singapore’: crossing urban boundaries’, (Williams, J. F., and Stimson, R. J. eds., *International Urban Planning Settings: Lessons of Success*, Elsevier Science, 2001), pp. 87–121.

50) Yeoh, B. S. A., ‘Cosmopolitanism and its exclusions in Singapore’, *Urban Studies*, 41, 2004a, pp. 2431–2445.

51) Savage, V. R., ‘Singapore’s renaissance city: crossing boundaries for the arts’, (Koh, S. L. ed., *Arts and Media in Singapore*, Ministry of Information and the Arts, 2000).

transnational flows⁵²⁾ and international interconnections.⁵³⁾

At the intra-national and intra-urban level, Singapore becomes an urban landscape of places. Given its diverse religious and ethnic identities, many studies have attempted to uncover the community bonding to places. Places are examined from in humanistic geographical perspectives, as sites of history, evoking nostalgia and defining heritage.⁵⁴⁾ The best collection of Singapore place studies is found in *Portraits of Places: History, Community and Identity in Singapore*.⁵⁵⁾ Chinatown, Little India, Kampong Glam reflect the ethnic attachments and religious landscape symbolisms of the Chinese, Indian and Malay communities in Singapore.⁵⁶⁾ Besides the ethnic districts, other studies have looked at places that have evoked a character of their own: Tanjong Pagar⁵⁷⁾ and Joo Chiat.⁵⁸⁾

Landscapes and places have not only defined the humanistic expressions in Singaporean geography, they have also revealed amongst faculty members expressions of advocacy. The studies of place attachment and place identities in Singapore have created in turn a defense for conservation and heritage.⁵⁹⁾ Having served as a demolition landscape agency in the 1960s and 1970s, the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) now jealously guards historic buildings, ethnic districts, heritage areas and cultural zones. On the one hand, there is the economic need and justification for conserving heritage buildings and specific ethnic or cultural places for tourism purposes.⁶⁰⁾ In other accounts, places and heritage awareness have wider national undercurrents in nation-building and national identity, especially for a country where rapid changes eradicate landscapes, destroy buildings and expunge roads. In the book, *Toponymics*,⁶¹⁾ it is argued that “place- and street-names are integral landscape buoys that give us locational bearings in space and historical relationships with the sequent occupance of past land-uses and activities. We need to conserve place- and street-names as part of our national heritage and everyday anchors to deepen national identity”.

Whether as nation or city, the ecosystem remains an integral component of Singapore’s identity, living environment and sustainability. Singaporean geographers have added to the lively debates about Singapore’s living environments at three levels. Firstly, as an urban environment, several studies have deliberated on the government’s correct ‘eco-logic’ on ‘brown issues’, its human intervention on environmental issues, its urban planning to create a garden city, its pragmatic

52) Yeoh, B. S. A., and Chang, T. C., ‘Globalising Singapore: Debating transnational flows in the city’, *Urban Studies*, 38, 2001, pp. 1025–1044.

53) See, (1) *op. cit.*, footnote 5) (2). (2) Yeung, H. W. C., ‘Singapore’s global reach: An executive report’, Department of Geography, National University of Singapore, 1999a.

54) *op. cit.*, footnote 10) (4).

55) *op. cit.*, footnote 10) (3).

56) *op. cit.*, footnote 10) (2).

57) Yeoh, B. S. A. *Community and Change: The Tanjong Pagar Community Club Story*, Armour, 1997.

58) *op. cit.*, footnote 11) (1).

59) Kong, L. L. L., and Yeoh, B. S. A., ‘Social constructions of nature in urban Singapore’, *Southeast Asian Studies*, 34, 1996, pp. 403–423.

60) See, (1) *op. cit.*, footnote 17) (3). (2) *op. cit.*, footnote 11) (4). (3) Chang, T. C., ‘Heritage as a tourism commodity: Traversing the tourist-local divide’, *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*, 18, 1997, pp. 46–68. (4) *op. cit.*, footnote 29) (1). (5) Savage, V. R., Huang, S. S. L., and Chang, T. C., ‘The Singapore River thematic zone: sustainable tourism in an urban context’, *Geographical Journal*, 170, 2005, pp. 212–225.

61) See, (1) *op. cit.*, footnote 11) (5). (2) *op. cit.*, footnote 45).

62) *op. cit.*, footnote 11) (5).

eradication of slum and squatters, its establishment of 'sanitized' public housing estates and its comprehensive infrastructure development of clean water, garbage and sewerage systems.⁶³⁾ To a large extent, model Singapore, in the eyes of other countries, lies in Singapore's successful replacement of poor living environments (slums and squatters) with public hygienic, government developed Housing and Development Board (HDB) housing estates.⁶⁴⁾ These issues of maintaining public hygiene, creating public healthy environments were areas of immense contention between the colonial authorities and the local resident communities in Singapore.⁶⁵⁾

Secondly, as a nation-state, the wider concerns of human-nature relationships have been explored in varied contexts. Savage⁶⁶⁾ has argued that the government has used effectively an 'environmental ideology' to sustain their political legitimacy that has oscillated between environmental determinism and possibilism. Reflections on nature deal with a wider relationship between persons and their attachments to flora and fauna, national bonding, gender perspectives, children's perceptions, and the wider relationships to the Mother Earth have filtered through in various studies.⁶⁷⁾ Maintaining environmental biodiversity and conserving Singapore's natural wealth, has remained an issue of intense debates between the government ministries and the environmental NGO, the Nature Society, Singapore (NSS). One aspect of this on-going debate is reflected in the politics of golf courses in Singapore.⁶⁸⁾

And thirdly, Savage⁶⁹⁾ has advocated a more pro-active policy of environmental education and eco-education in Singapore and the region, to ensure a long-term solution for environmental

63) See, (1) Savage, V. R., and Kong, L. L. L., 'Urban constraints, political imperatives: environmental 'design' in Singapore', *Landscape and Urban Planning*, 25, 1993, pp. 37-52. (2) Savage, V. R., 'Eco-development in Singapore', (Ooi, G. L. ed., *Environment and the city: sharing Singapore's experience and future challenges*, Times Academic Press, 1995), pp. 313-330. (3) Savage, V. R., 'Singapore's garden city: Translating environmental possibilism', (Ooi, G. L., and Kwok, K. eds., *City and the State: Singapore's Built Environment Revisited*, Oxford University Press and Institute of Policy Studies, 1997b), pp. 187-202.

64) Savage, V. R., 'Singapore development guide plan concept: A review', (Awang, A., Salim, M., and Halldane, J. F. eds., *Improving Urban Environment in South East Asia: Managing Industrialisation Through Satellite Communities*, Institute Sultan Iskandar of Urban Habitat and Highrise, 1997c), pp. 261-284.

65) Yeoh, B. S. A. *Contesting Space Power Relations and the Urban Built Environment in Colonial Singapore*, Oxford University Press, 1996.

66) See, (1) Savage, V. R., 'Human-environment relations: Singapore's environmental ideology', (Ban, K. C., Pakir, A., and Tong, C. K. eds., *Imagining Singapore*, Times Academic Press, 1992), pp. 187-217. (3) *op. cit.*, footnote 63) (3). (4) Savage, V. R., 'Singapore's environmental ideology', (Ban, K. C., Pakir, A., and Tong, C. K. eds., *Imagining Singapore*, Eastern Universities Press, 2004), pp. 210-239.

67) See, (1) Kong, L. L. L., 'Nature's dangers, nature's pleasures: urban children and the natural world', (Holloway, S. L., and Valentine, G. comp., *Children's Geographies*, Routledge, 2000), pp. 257-271. (2) Kong, L. L. L., Yuen, B. P. K., Briffett, C., Sodhi, N. S., 'Nature and nurture, delight and danger: urban women's experiences of the natural world', *Landscape Research*, 22, 1997, pp. 245-266. (3) Kong, L. L. L., Yuen, B. P. K., Sodhi, N. S., Briffett, C., 'The construction and experience of nature: perspectives of urban youths', *Tijdschrift Voor Economische En Sociale Geografie = Netherlands Journal of Economic and Social Geography*, 90, 1999, pp. 3-16. (4) Kong, L. L. L., and Yeoh, B. S. A., 'Social constructions of nature in urban Singapore', *Southeast Asian Studies*, 34, 1996, pp. 403-423. (5) Savage, V. R., and Phoon-Cohen, Penelope. eds., *Mad About Green*, Singapore Environment Council, Undated.

68) Neo, H., and Savage, V. R., 'Shades of green, fields of gold: representations, discourse and the politics of golf in Singapore' *Landscape Research*, 27, 2002, pp. 397-411.

69) See, (1) Savage, V. R., 'North-South environmental issues: eco-education in Southeast Asia', (Savage, V. R., Kong, L., and Neville, W. eds., *The Naga Awakens: Growth and Change in Southeast Asia*, Times Academic Press, 1998a), pp. 261-284. (2) Savage, V. R., 'Sustainable development: Government intervention and environmental education', (Savage, V. R., and Kong, L. eds., *Environmental Stakes: Myanmar and Agenda 21*, Hans Seidel Foundation, 1997d), pp. 111-138. (3) Savage, V. R., 'Eco-education in Singapore', (Ooi, G. L. ed., *Environment and the City*, Times Academic Press, 1995), pp. 313-330. (4) Savage, V. R., 'Urban environmental management: lessons in eco-education', (Azman, A., Mahbob, S., and Halldane, J. E. eds., *Environmental and Urban Management in Southeast Asia*, University of Malaya Press, 1994), pp. 325-343.

challenges and problems. This application of environmental knowledge and awareness was taken to the region and most successfully translated in Myanmar. An all-NUS team of academics, led by Savage successfully ran the first environmental workshop in Yangon for senior government officials. This workshop culminated in an edited book, with the first public environmental statements on Myanmar written by their government officials.⁷⁰⁾

(2) Migration, diaspora and gender issues

Singapore is the archetypical diasporic city. Indeed over 95 percent of its population is a product of the colonial induced diasporic movements in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: Chinese, Indians, Javanese, Bugis, Minangkabaus and Malays migrated to Singapore in search of work and a better life. Migrant labor, skills, ideas and community bonding created the Singapore story and they continue to do so today. The city-state continues to embrace migrants as part of its economic policy, attracting labor migrants at both ends of the economic spectrum: educated, highly skilled, global migrants and the lower end, blue collar labor. It is thus not surprising that nearly 25 percent of Singapore's current population of 4.3 million people is made up of foreigner migrants. This large reservoir of labor migrants has been a fertile source of research by several members of the Department. The Department's faculty have been responsible for eight edited books and no less than 25 articles dealing with migrants, diaspora and labor migration in Singapore and the region.⁷¹⁾

Given that a large proportion of labor migrants in Singapore and the region are domestic female helpers (maids) who come from the Philippines, Indonesia and other Southeast Asian countries, a major sub-theme of migration literature from the Department reflects gender issues and feminist geographies.⁷²⁾ The gender issues cover a wide spectrum of concerns with regard to female workers: national identity tensions;⁷³⁾ legal coverage and issues;⁷⁴⁾ health related problems;⁷⁵⁾ the implications on civil society;⁷⁶⁾ political challenges;⁷⁷⁾ labour relationships;⁷⁸⁾ the impacts on family life and other economic and social impacts.⁸⁰⁾ Gender geographies from the above research and publication menu do demonstrate that they are wide-ranging and cover a spectrum that is equal

70) Savage, V. R., and Kong, L. L. eds., *Environmental Stakes: Myanmar and Agenda 21*, Hans Seidel Foundation, 1997.

71) See, (1) Beatriz, P. L., Piper, N., Shen, H., Yeoh, B. S. A. eds., *Asian migrations: sojourning, displacement, homecoming and other travels*, Asia Research Institute, 2005. (2) Jatrana, S., Miika, T., and Yeoh, B. S. A. *Migration and Health in Asia*, Routledge-Curzon, 2005. (3) *op. cit.*, footnote 16). (4) Charney, M. W., Yeoh, B. S. A., Tong, C. K. eds., *Chinese Migrants Abroad: Cultural, Educational and Social Dimensions of the Chinese Diaspora*, World Scientific, 2003. (5) Pfliegerl, J., Khoo, S. E., Yeoh, B. S. A., Koh, V. eds., *Researching Migration and Family*, Asia MetaCentre for Population and Sustainable Development Analysis, 2003.

72) See, (1) *op. cit.*, footnote 16). (2) Devasahayam, T. W., Huang, S. S. L., Yeoh, B. S. A. eds., (Special 50th Anniversary Issue on Southeast Asian Migrant Women: Navigating Borders, Negotiating Scales). *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*, 25, 2004. (3) *op. cit.*, footnote 12). (4) Willis, K., and Yeoh, B. S. A. eds., *Gender and Migration*, Edward Elgar, 2000.

73) Lam T., and Yeoh, B. S. A., 'Negotiating 'home' and 'national identity': Chinese-Malaysian transmigrants in Singapore', *Asia Pacific Viewpoint*, 45, 2005, pp. 141-164.

74) *op. cit.*, footnote 12) (3).

75) *op. cit.*, footnote 71) (2).

76) *op. cit.*, footnote 20) (3).

77) Huang, S. S. L. and Yeoh, B. S. A., 'Ties that bind: State policy and migrant female domestic helpers in Singapore', *Geoforum*, 27, 1996, pp. 479-493.

78) Yeoh, B. S. A., 'Bifurcated labour: the unequal incorporation of transmigrants in Singapore', *Tijdschrift Voor Economische En Sociale Geografie = Netherlands Journal of Economic and Social Geography*, 97, 2006, pp. 26-37.

to the whole gamut of human geographical concern.

The Department has seen a rise in gender geographies on varied themes and topics, a product no doubt of the dramatic increase in female faculty (Shirlena Huang, Lily Kong, Peggy Teo, Brenda Yeoh) in the Department over the last 15 years, compared to the lone female faculty member (Teo Siew Eng) in the earlier years. In particular, Shirlena Huang and Brenda Yeoh⁸¹⁾ have documented the feminization of geography in NUS. For example, the undergraduate student body in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences is predominantly populated by female students since the 1970–71 in-take of students. The Honours class of 1972–73 was the last year where male (5 students) outnumbered female (4) students in the Department; since then females have outnumbered males in very Honours year. Despite this female student domination in the Faculty and Department, the introduction of the gender module (Geography of Gender: Women and Change) in 1994–95 seemed a rather late development. But the female presence is now being registered in the university, with the current Head (Shirlena Huang), the first female dean in the faculty from 2000 to 2003 (Lily Kong) and current Vice-Provost of the University (Lily Kong) making in-roads in university administration. It endorses what Yeoh, Huang and Wong⁸²⁾ assert that: “as women and as geographers, we have a difference to make in our teaching, research and the service we render to the university and wider community”.

(3) Globalization : global cities, cosmopolitan populations & local dialogue

The whole globalization discourse is a recent phenomenon that has taken the Social Sciences by storm. After Peter Dicken's pioneering book, *Global Shifts*, geographers were among the forefront advocates of the globalization processes and issues.⁸⁴⁾ Despite Dicken's⁸⁵⁾ lament that geography's lead in globalization has been short-lived, in the Department it continues to provide academic resonance.⁸⁶⁾ This partly reflects that Henry Yeung was a PhD student under Dicken, and thus brought not only the globalization concept to the Department⁸⁷⁾ but became an active exponent of its manifestations in economic geography⁸⁸⁾. The Department hosted the first globalization workshop at NUS in December 1997 which brought together some of the important exponents in the field.⁸⁹⁾ Henry Yeung's economic geography contributions on globalization was

79) See, (1) *op. cit.*, footnote 12) (1). (2) Huang, S., and Yeoh, B. S. A., 'Transnational families and their children's education: China's "study mothers" in Singapore', *Global Networks*, 5, 2005, pp. 379–400. (3) Asis, M. M. B., Huang, S. S. L., and Yeoh, B. S. A., 'When the light of the home is abroad: unskilled female migration and the Filipino family', *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*, 25, 2004, pp. 198–215.

80) Yeoh, B. S. A., Huang S. S. L., and Gonzalez, J. L. III., 'Migrant female domestic workers: debating the economic, social and political impacts in Singapore', *International Migration Review*, 33, 1999, pp. 0115–0137.

81) See, (1) *op. cit.*, footnote 5) (1). (2) *op. cit.*, footnote 5) (2).

82) *op. cit.*, footnote 5) (1).

83) Dicken, P. *Global Shift: Industrial Change in a Turbulent World*, First Edition, Harper & Row, 1986.

84) Dicken, P., 'Geographers and 'globalization': (yet) another missed boat?', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 29, No 1, 2004, pp. 5–25.

85) *ibid.*, pp. 5–25.

86) Coe, N., Hess, M., Yeung, H. W. C., Dicken, P., Henderson, J., "'Globalizing'" regional development: a global production networks perspective', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 29, 2004, pp. 468–484.

87) *op. cit.*, footnote 13) (2).

88) See, (1) Yeung, H. W. C., 'Practicing new economic geographies: a methodological examination', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 93, 2003, pp. 442–462.

89) *op. cit.*, footnote 13) (1).

translating its processes, relationships and implications in non-western states (Singapore, Southeast Asia, China) and non-western institutions (Chinese businesses and Hong Kong transnational corporations — TNCs⁹⁰⁾ has argued even further that capitalism is not culturally neutral and that there is in East Asia, a hybrid form of capitalism.

Yeung's research on Hong Kong and Singapore Transnational Corporations (TNCs) and Chinese businesses underscore Peter Dicken's recent clarification that globalization is not a universalizing agent creating a uni-directional homogenous perspective in economic geography. Just as there are "many different varieties of capitalism", there is also no such thing as a "pure" transnational corporation, since some degree of "hybridization" is at work, and a "placeless" TNC is "unsupported by empirical evidence"⁹²⁾. But Yeung's most important contribution to economic geography lies in his critical examination of the 'relational turn' in economic geography and his deepening of theoretical constructs of the 'nature of relationality and power relations' (relational geometries). Using a more dynamic definition of power, Yeung⁹⁴⁾ applies the relational framework to regional development beyond the current "stock-taking approach" in which his "relational approach" seeks to "identify the complex relational geometry comprising *local* and *non-local* actors, *tangible* and *intangible* assets, *formal* and *informal* institutional structures, and their interactive power relations".

Despite the plethora of studies on globalization, there is still much confusion about its definitions, its conceptual underpinnings, its manifestations, its historical contextualization and its end products. Globalization has thus been expressed as time-space compression, borderless worlds, and interconnections across scales (local, regional and global). After Kenichi Ohmae's influential book, *The Borderless World*, globalization discourses tended to veer to accepting a unilateral and hegemonic force creating global economic and cultural homogenization with the demise of the state. But elsewhere, Savage and Tan-Mullins⁹⁶⁾ have argued that globalization is not an "inevitable process but an issue that governments court, promote or reject consciously" in the region. Brenda Yeoh's classification of the global process under the global, non-global and globalising is interesting though in reality, the shades of the globalizing process probably are less defined. In Southeast Asia, Singapore best exemplifies the global city or city-state, Myanmar the non-global and the rest of the ASEAN states are globalizing.

But the mainstay of academic interventions by faculty on globalization has dealt less with the conceptual or theoretical discussions than with the manifestations and processes involved.

90) See, (1) *op. cit.*, footnote 32). (2) Yeung, H. W. C., 'Under siege? Economic globalization and Chinese business in Southeast Asia', *Economy and Society*, 28, 1999b, pp. 1-29. (3) *op. cit.*, footnote 24) (1). (4) *op. cit.*, footnote 26).

91) *op. cit.*, footnote 84).

92) *ibid.*, pp. 12-13.

93) Yeung, H. W. C., 'Rethinking relational economic geography', *Transactions Institute of British Geographers*, 30, 2004b, pp. 37-51.

94) *ibid.*, pp. 48.

95) Ohmae, K. *The Borderless World*, HarperCollins, 1990.

96) Savage, V. R., and Tan-Mullins, M., 'State identities and regional personifications in a globalised world', (Savage, V. R. and Tan-Mullins, M. eds., *The Naga Challenged: Southeast Asia in the Winds of Change*, Marshall Cavendish Academic, 2005), pp. 1-38.

97) Yeoh, B. S. A., 'Global / globalizing cities', *Progress in Human Geography*, 23, 1999, pp. 607-616.

Globalisation has thus been applied to regional tourism,⁹⁸⁾ theme-park tourism,⁹⁹⁾ global-local relationships in tourism,¹⁰⁰⁾ cities and urban contexts,¹⁰¹⁾ the retailing industry¹⁰²⁾ and environmental issues.¹⁰³⁾ Besides the economic ramifications of globalization, its socio-cultural processes have been moot points of deliberation. One social spin-off of globalization, multiculturalism and migration is the resurrection of the cosmopolitanism theme. While no conceptualization of cosmopolitanism is “adequate”¹⁰⁴⁾ discussion on the Singapore government’s cosmopolitan vision is one outcome of globalizing realities and national exigencies. Yet while cosmopolitanism might be in keeping with the city-state’s political credo of maintaining a multi-racial, multi-cultural and multi-religious society, the grassroots reality shows resistance to ‘foreign talent’ and will the government accept a changing ‘racial arithmetic’ if more of the ‘others’ are accepted in Singapore society.¹⁰⁵⁾ Moreover with distinctions between heartlanders (public housing dwellers) and cosmopolitans in Singapore suggest new class distinctions.¹⁰⁶⁾ Given the generally positive vibes (global cities, winners, clusters)¹⁰⁷⁾ about globalization, the book by Lee and Yeoh best underscore the more negative socio-cultural issues of globalism. Addressing what they call “forgotten and marginalized places”, they argue that the forgotten “is not just confined to those depicted in terms of stasis, economic decline, slow growth, comparatively low quality of life or minimal prospects for improvement. Rather, such places are actively forged as products of the politics of inclusion and exclusion and by power struggles played out among global, national and local actors in globalization processes”¹⁰⁸⁾.

VI REFLECTIONS

So what about Singapore’s human geography contributions? As a small Department, Singaporean geographers are very much plugged into the Anglo-American school of geography. Given that Anglo-American geography remains the major torch-bearer of contemporary geography, every young geographer worldwide that wants international recognition has to publish in Anglo-American geographical journals. The academic pressure by university administrations to publish in top notch or Tier One internationally referred journals, has boosted Anglo-American journals and marginalized regional geographical journals. To penetrate these

98) *op. cit.*, footnote 15).

99) Teo, P. C. C. and Yeoh, B. S. A., ‘Strategies to meet the challenges of theme parks in Singapore’, *Pacific Tourism Review*, 5, 2001, pp. 97–111.

100) Teo, P. C. C., and Lim, H. L., ‘Global and local interactions in tourism’, *Annals of Tourism Research*, 30, 2003, pp. 287–306.

101) *op. cit.*, footnote 97).

102) Savage, V. R., ‘Globalising retailing in Singapore: Cultural commodification and economic change’, (Dawson, J., Mukoyama, M., Sang, C. C., and Larke, R., eds., *The Internationalisation of Retailing in Asia*, Routledge Curson, 2003), pp. 94–113.

103) Savage, V. R., Huang, S. S. L., Kong, L. L. L., and Yeoh, B. S. A., ‘Global environmental change: the Singapore response’, (Singh, R. B., ed., *Urban Sustainability in the Context of Global Change Towards Promoting Healthy and Green Cities*, Science Publishers, 2001), pp. 1–16.

104) See, (1) Vertovec, S. and Cohen, R., ‘Introduction: conceiving cosmopolitanism’, (Vertovec, S., and Cohen, R., eds., *Conceiving Cosmopolitanism: Theory, Context, and Practice*, Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 1–22. (2) *op. cit.*, footnote 50).

105) *ibid.*, pp. 2437–2441.

106) *op. cit.*, footnote 50).

107) Lee, Y. S., and Yeoh, B. S. A. eds., *Globalisation and the Politics of Forgetting*, Routledge, 2006.

108) *ibid.*

journals requires voices from non Anglo-American countries to use the same institutional language of these journals. How are developing countries with different economic challenges expected to engage and understand the established Anglo-American economic geography jargon of “institutional thickness”, “untraded interdependencies” and “relativization of scale” without fully understanding the cultural and regional contexts of the United Kingdom and United States.¹⁰⁹⁾

Ironically, while the distinguishing aspect of Singaporean geographical contributions lie in the regional and place specializations of Singapore and the Southeast Asia region, these ‘regional’ and place specific geographies remain marginal and peripheral to the Anglo-American world. Singaporean geographers, however, have been fortunate to have their academic voices heard in the global geographical chorus for two reasons. Firstly, despite its small size either by geographical area or population, Singapore remains an interesting case study for the developing world and development geography because it has moved from Third World to First World status in a matter of 40 years.¹¹⁰⁾ Given Singapore’s equatorial location, her rapid development is particularly relevant and interesting to developing states in the tropical world, where environmental deterministic ideas and beliefs still remain explanations for underdevelopment.¹¹¹⁾ Even Jeffrey Sachs, in explaining global poverty, has accepted that geography and environment are important factors in explaining the problems of poverty in many countries and regions. In his words: “The combination of Africa’s adverse geography and its extreme poverty creates the worst poverty trap in the world”.¹¹²⁾

Secondly, Singapore’s unique achievements and challenges in many areas such as population controls, public housing, land transport systems, port management, ship repairs, urban environmental management and its global brand names in Changi Airport and Singapore Airlines has made it a ‘model’ city-state that other nation-states have keenly tried to understand and replicate.¹¹³⁾ In many ways the speed, scale, and success of Singapore’s developmental progress in the last 40 years has given Singaporean geographers much gmst for the research mill. Singaporean geographers initially had less incentive to look beyond their national boundaries given the plenitude of research agendas for academic enquiry locally.

109) Yeung, H. W. C., and Liu, W., ‘Teaching economic geography in two contrasting Asian contexts: decentering Anglo-American economic geography in China and Singapore’, *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, 2006, Vol 30 (forthcoming).

110) *op. cit.*, footnote 33).

111) See, (1) Savage, V. R. *Western Impressions of Nature and Landscape in Southeast Asia*, Singapore University Press, 1984. (2) *op. cit.*, footnote 66) (3).

112) *op. cit.*, footnote 27).

113) *ibid.*, pp. 208.

114) *ibid.*, pp. 98.

Human Geography Singapore Perspectives

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Geography has been taught as a university subject for over 75 years and the Department of Geography at the National University of Singapore is the only fully fledged academic Geography Department in Singapore. Based on the last 15 years (1990–2005) this paper looks at the research contributions on human geography of mainly the Singaporean geographers in the Department. This article asserts that the Department has gone through a renaissance in the last 15 years reflecting a new influx of young geographers, the changing university system from a British to an American research-driven system, and the catalytic research impact of three faculty members in the Department: Lily Kong, Henry Yeung and Brenda Yeoh. The research output in human geography in the Department has been prodigious and reflects mainly contributions in three areas: Singapore as nation, city and urban ecosystem; diasporas, migration and gender issues; and varied operational aspects of globalization dealing with global cities, cosmopolitan populations, transnational corporations, and global-local dialogues.