Singapore

Ideology
Society
Culture

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THE SINGAPORE EXPERIMENT

Singapore, certainly to the sociologist or anthropologist, is one of the most interesting and rewarding societies for study anywhere in the world. It is small in its physical scale, and yet immensely complex in its organization. Its population comprises three of the major ethnic groups of Asia – Chinese, Malay and Indian, and numerous smaller groups. Each of these groups in turn is divided into many sub-divisions based on dialect, language, place of origin, occupations, caste, class and detailed cultural affiliation and practices. All or almost all of the world's major religions, and many of the minor ones, are to be found represented in the tiny island Republic. And at the same time, Singapore is moving into the ranks of Asia's leading commercial, trading, industrial and financial centres, is experiencing intense urbanization and rapid modernization of its environment and facilities. Taken together this combination represent a unique sociological experiment. And not only sociological, but political and economic too. Singapore is known for its orderly society, its cleanliness, its relative efficiency. How has this situation been brought about and how is it maintained?

These are large questions and will no doubt be a permanent source of debate, both in Singapore and amongst anyone interested in the Singapore experiment. No exhaustive account can be given of every facet – cultural, sociological, religious and so on – of the country, certainly not in a single book. Nevertheless, a beginning needs to be made in synthesizing the numerous small studies that have been made of Singapore's culture and society into a more coherent picture. The essays collected in this book represent one point of view – that of a sociologist and anthropologist concerned, to explore the underlying processes and structures of Singapore society. Certain key themes – the scale of Singapore, its historical heritage, the important roles of language, culture and ethnicity, the fact of change and the significance of order – provide the main focus. The essays speak for themselves, and although they overlap, to a great extent each can be read alone and in its own right. Some of them are critical – Singapore is not yet a utopia – but the criticisms are offered in a constructive spirit – that by exposing to the light of day the processes and structures operating within society, and by debating what is found, society can be rationally changed for the better.

By focussing on the issues taken up here it is also hoped to illustrate the ways in which a socio-anthropological approach to Singapore society can be enlightening and enriching – something that will hopefully stimulate others, and especially Singaporeans themselves, to think in depth about the organization of their society. Singapore is very much an experiment – one in which constant change has become the norm. While this creates problems, some of which are illustrated here, it also opens up possibilities for the future – for change towards a society which is a genuine community – not an experiment for its own sake, but an end-state in which economic growth, political stability, ethnic diversity and cultural creativity can be harmonized. The achievement of such a state is no easy task, and the essays in this book are offered not as solution, but in the profound belief that understanding the past, the present and the processes of transformation, is the first step on the way to those solutions which would prove the Singapore experiment to have been worth the undertaking.

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PART I

PERSPECTIVES

APPROACHES TO THE URBAN ANTHROPOLOGY OF SINGAPORE SOCIETY

Introduction

Urban Anthropology — the application of the traditional techniques of anthropological analysis to the social and cultural systems of cities — has only recently come to be identified as a specific sub-discipline of the total anthropological enterprise. Although precursors from the more distant past can always be found to give one's new enterprise a respectible pedigree, it is actually only in the last decade or so that much in the way of serious anthropological work has been directed towards modern cities, and that a journal[1], readers, textbooks[2] and sessions of conferences have appeared directed single-mindedly to the propagation of urban anthropology as a variety of anthropology as serious in its intentions and as worthy of consideration and funding as the other more well established sub-disciplinary interests, such as kinship, economic anthropology and religion.

In one important respect of course, urban anthropology is not in competition with these traditional themes: rather it *includes* them, but in their urban manifestations, rather than in their rural/tribal ones. The essential shift in emphasis is thus from rural to urban, rather than an abandonment of the classical anthropological themes. There have of course been some shifts in emphasis consequent upon the selection of the urban context, and so such topics as migration, restructuring of tribal relationships within the city, squatting, urban poverty, have come to prominence. This increasing interest in the city is often traced to two sources — the ever increasing significance of the urban milieu in the modern world, and the corresponding decline in the number and significance of tribal societies. At this point I should introduce my own value orientation into the discussion, as there are certain undesirable aspects of the direction in which some urban anthropology is developing which I believe need to be opposed.

One of these is the belief that the only valid field for anthropology is that of tribal societies, and so interest in urban societies is merely a way of staving off the demise of anthropology as a discipline for as long as possible. Actually it has never been the case that anthropology has been exc'ısively a tribally orientated subject. Anthropologists have not only long been interested in the "traditional" city (i.e. the pre-modern, pre-industrial city) and in civilizations which have always had an important urban component (e.g. the Chinese, Indian, Javanese), but have also found it impossible in practice to ignore the links between the rural and urban sectors of the particular society which formed the object of their study. Turning to the urban should not therefore be seen as a last ditch stand of a dying subject, but rather the natural and inevitable extension of the traditional anthropological methods. I indeed would prefer to see anthropology defined by its methods and its theoretical intention (the discovery and explication of systems of *meaning*) than by some artificial attempt to confine it to a particular kind of society.

A natural corrolary of this is that anthropologists interested in urban civilizations should entirely reject the frequently followed view of Eric Wolf that "The anthropologist has a professional license to study such interstitial, supplementary, and parallel structures in complex society and to expose their relation to the major strategic, over-arching institutions".[3] Such a view confines anthropology to the no-doubt interesting but trivial sub-systems of society, leaving the structural and significant processes to altogether different fields of study (sociology? economics?). Again I would contend that such a view is not only unnecessary and uncalled for, but also contradicts anthropology's traditional emphasis on holism, the understanding of structures and the integration of levels of meaning into a total picture of the society. Wolf's view leaves the anthropologist with only the pickings left over when the other disciplines have finished. What all these commentators seem additionally to have forgotten is that the central concept of anthropology − culture − is left intact regardless of the type of society or its historical epoch. It is to the continuing analysis of this concept that the urban anthropologist should return. The city (or the complex society containing cities) provides a dynamic and crucial laboratory for the working out of the ramifications of this concept. And of course the anthropologist (or sociologist of culture) working in Singapore has no alternative but to come to terms with these issues.

A Methodological Note

There are of course certain amendments that have to be made to the methodological procedures of anthropology when it is applied to urban societies. Traditionally the anthropologist works on a face-to-face basis with informants that he knows as a result of day by day contact and interaction and participant observation. His unit of study is likely to be a bounded unit geographically and/or socially − a village, a lineage or even a whole clan or tribe, an island community, or an ethnic group distinct from its neighbours. The anthropologist working in the urban setting however faces different problems − problems of scale (too many individuals to know them all personally), problems of distance (between informants; difficulties of travelling), dispersed communities of the group that he is interested in, and so on. The classical methods of fieldwork still continue to be applicable, but they clearly have limitations. It is possible for the urban anthropologist to limit himself to groups to which these methods can be applied − kindship, patron-client relationships, friendship, cliques, corporate groups such as lineages, or other sets of networks or informal groups. But if he wishes to go beyond this level he must be willing to use other techniques − some of these being derived from sociology (quantitative surveys in particular; the questionnaire as a research tool; the use of research assistants etc.) and some from the humanities (literacy sources, historical records, parish registers, diaries and memories etc.). Urban anthropology is indeed one place where the traditional techniques of anthropology and sociology meet − the qualitative depth requires the quantitative breadth in exactly the same way that survey findings always require the addition of qualitative studies to fill them out. The two types of methodology are thus not contradictory, but complementary. They operate at different *levels* of analysis to be sure, but are both equally essential in the urban setting. Again, such a view is not entirely new. It was pioneered by Maurice Freedman in his studies of Chinese society, a field which, he quite rightly argued, required the anthropologist to break out of his purely self-imposed methodological limitations.[4]

The Anthropological Characteristics of Singapore Urban Society

Singapore provides an immensely rich location for the testing and formulation of concepts and hypotheses in urban anthropology. My intention in this section will be to

set out some of its salient characteristics as they might appear to the urban anthropolo
gist. Singapore is clearly a very small country. As a city-state in fact it is one of the
smallest countries in the world. But here we should introduce the distinction, discussed
by Benedict in his useful discussion of social scale,[5] between small scale *territories* and
small scale *societies*. A very large territorial area can contain a "small scale" society, i.e.
one characterized by a lack of internal diversity and external linkages, and conversely, as
in the case of Singapore, a very small territorial area can contain a "large scale" society,
i.e. one characterized by a high degree of internal diversity, complexity of culture and
socio-economic organization and by a multiplicity of outside contacts and linkages. The
territorial scale of Singapore is thus linked to its degree of social complexity in a very
interesting way — rather than leading to the simplification of the social order, the small
size of the country promotes an intensity of interaction which, when related to the high
degree of urbanization, level of technology, ethnic complexity and degree of information
flow and outside relationships, promotes a society of (in Benedict's terms) very large
scale.

But at the same time Singapore still retains many of its "traditional" features in
terms of the organization of individual ethnic groups, religious and cultural practices.
While the total social field is relatively small (2½ million people within the country), it is,
at certain levels, highly segmented (again by class, ethnicity, religion, caste, etc.),
although with a considerable degree of proximity and interaction between the segments,
and a great degree of unity at the political level. In these respects Singapore shares certain
characteristics with other Third World cities, but in some other and very important
respects it is sharply differentiated from such cities. One such respect is the lack of
in-migration. To be sure Singapore *originated* from such migration from both within its
immediate hinterland and beyond, but such migration has now virtually ceased (unlike,
say, Jakarta, where in-migration is a persistant problem). Most population growth is thus
simply natural increase. Most "guest workers" are simply that — temporary stop-gaps to
fill pressing vacancies and/or jobs that cannot yet be done or are not sought after by
Singaporeans themselves.

There are some other important characteristics of Singapore society which also need
to be mentioned. Singapore is of course a city state (a rarity in itself in the modern
world), but it became one by accident, when it left the Malayan Union, and thus changed
overnight from a city *within* a region, to a country in its own right. Its natural hinterland,
while not disappearing, radically changed in its status (political and economic as well as
social) as a result. It could certainly be argued that this seemingly disastrous loss was
actually very much to Singapore's advantage, since it forced the country to look beyond
provincial horizons to the rest of the region and the world beyond for commercial,
technological and cultural reasons and also removed at one stroke the possible burden of
a vast and relatively poor rural "backyard", leaving the government and population great
flexibility of movement. The linkages between Singapore and Malaysia still of course
persist at many levels, and the flow of goods, people, information etc. between the two
countries is still extensive, and would incidentally, make an interesting and significant
topic for further research.

Equally important is Singapore's colonial origin. Whether one likes it or not it must
be admitted that the influence of the colonial period still runs very deep, as instanced by
ties of language, commerce, education and culture, political institutions, the ethnic
composition of the country, its legal system and that impossible to define, but very real
quality of subtle Anglo-Saxon cultural understanding which exists between many
Singaporeans and British culture. (Most Singaporeans in other words still feel much more

at home in the context of British culture than they do in, for instance, French; most educated Vietnamese however are more at home with French culture than with British.)

These (and many other) features of Singapore society require that certain principles of approach by the urban anthropologist need to be defined. Firstly, it will not do to adopt the "shanty-town" approach, i.e. looking at the city from its margins. This approach which is very popular with some urban anthropologists is hardly applicable in Singapore, where not only are squatter-settlements virtually unknown, but additionally to concentrate attention on the seemingly "fringe" areas — urban villages etc. — while not invalid in itself, misses the real issues, since these common characteristics of Third World cities are absent. Secondly the anthropologist dealing with Singapore must recognize that he is dealing with a society of a high cultural level, not only in respect of the country as a whole, but also in relation to the individual ethnic groups that comprise it. So again the classic model of "tribesmen in the city" is not applicable in the Singapore context. It follows from this, and the characteristics noted above, that the "adaptation" model of urban anthropology is of very limited utility here — i.e. the idea that a major theme of urban anthropology is the study of the adaptation of a rural/tribal population to an urban milieu not of their own making into which they migrate seeking job opportunities. Singapore itself is a product of the interaction of the original migrant groups in a colonial setting; the city is their creation, not an alien environment to which they are forced to come for economic reasons. This is clearly reflected in the city's social structure and architecture. Singapore is now several generations into a situation where locally born people are born into this urban environment. There are of course certain intriguing paradoxes nevertheless — one being that many of the Malay population of Singapore, who are associated with a rural way of life, are actually wholly urban in their style of life; while many Chinese, who are popularly associated with commerce and cities, are actually of a rural (peasant) background!

Thirdly, it must be recognized that Singapore is to a great extent a *planned* rather than a "natural" city. The ubiquitousness of government in small states is often remarked upon, and Singapore is no exception to this principle. Not only is the government involved, formally or informally, at almost every level of urban life, but the physical characteristics of the city, and much of the life within the city, — order, cleanliness and regulation — reflect the ethos of the government. An example of this can be found in the role of the "informal sector" in Singapore. In most Third World cities the informal sector — i.e. those economic activities which fall outside of formal regulation (such as hawking, petty commodity production, unregulated cottage industries) — play a significant role in generating employment and income, not only for poorer people, but also by way of supplementary activities for professionals, government servants etc. But in Singapore the informal sector is noteworthy for its absence, and its active suppression by government when evidences of it are discovered. The keeping of animals (pigs, goats, chickens etc.), growing of vegetables, household petty commodity production, free-lance hawking etc. are all discouraged, forbidden or strictly regulated. Once again the interests of "order" and the demands of big business and bureaucracy stifle the natural economic and productive instincts of many Singaporeans. Whether or not the informal sector is a good thing or is a symptom of underdevelopment is an issue I will not go into here: at this juncture it is merely used as an illustration of the socio-political process of regulation so widespread in Singapore.

Consequences and a Research Agenda

In this section of the paper I will attempt to expand some of these points and characteristics into an agenda for research, partly to highlight these very characteristics and

partly to indicate some of the analytical areas to which work should (or in some cases is) being directed.

The role of the city as the site of the creation and diffusion of innovations (cultural, technological etc.) has long been recognized.[6] But what is Singapore's role in this respect? Singapore for the most part does not create or diffuse innovations, so much as receive and utilize them. Singapore is a highly technological society, but this is as a result of technology transfer, not indigenous development. A similar phenomenon is apparent in the commercial sector too, and carries with it the attendant dangers of the middleman role – development of service rather than productive industries, too much foreign control of the economy, willingness to favour MNCs over local businessmen, etc. The (overstressed, but real) problem of the lack of cultural development in Singapore is linked to this. In Redfield and Singer's terms, the problem for Singapore is that of moving from what they call the "heterogenetic" role of the city (technical, administrative) to the "orthogenetic" role (i.e. contributing to the formation of a culture indigenous to its area, becoming a centre of the arts, etc.)

A number of interesting anthropological issues can be raised in this context. As we have already noted, social networks in Singapore are dense, but largely separated from one another on the basis of the ethnic, religious and cultural affiliation of the participants. It is in the light of this that we should consider an interesting varient of the adaptation hypothesis – that many cultural groups are not so much adapting *to* the city, as adapting the city *for* their particular ends. The widespread persistence of folk societies within the modern city is perhaps symptomatic of this. What we actually know very little indeed about is the *ideology* of urban living in Singapore – relationships between urban space and life style for instance; differing concepts and images of the city by different ethnic, cultural, occupational and status groups; differential reactions to the so-called pressures of urban living – reactions to crowding, use of the city as a resource, moral responses to the city, etc.

The question of culture is itself another major issue. As anthropologists we would here not only have to consider government thinking and policy, but also the individual communities' perception of the issue. What do people in Singapore mean when they talk about culture? can we fruitfully make the distinction here between folk, popular (or mass) and elite cultures?; if so, what comprises each category? who participates? as consumers or producers? Need culture necessarily (or indeed is it ever?) perfectly integrated, exclusive, distinctive and systematic? Can culture be planned or is it always spontaneous? Should what some people would regard as being the authentic and indigenous Singaporean cultures – the Baba Chinese and Eurasian – be regarded not as marginal cultures, but on the contrary as models for the cultural integration of the wider society? Is it possible (there is a lot of comparative evidence to suggest that it is) to have a viable society with major ethnic and cultural divergences, but which is politically united? Can individuals be multi-cultural in the same way that they are multilingual? There are no doubt many other questions, but even this limited sample indicates that a detailed investigation of the whole concept of culture in Singapore is overdue from an anthropological point of view.

A related problem that is sometimes raised is that of *community*. What are communities and do any exist in Singapore? Is a community in Singapore an ethnic, religious, linguistic, occupational or spatial entity? Why have the HDB housing estates not apparently succeeded in promoting any high degree of neighbourliness amongst their populations? Clearly such problems can be approached at what is really a philosophical level – "What is community?", but they can also be approached in a very concrete way

by the urban anthropologist. What are the actual relations between neighbours? In what public places do people interact? At what point do their personal or ethnic networks intersect with those of members of other cultural or ethnic groups? Where do they shop or market? What languages do they speak in these various situations? Such issues are sometimes condensed into the anthropological concept of *units of integration*. Such units in which interaction takes place may include such locations as markets, festivals, public transport, eating places, sports, educational institutions, etc. One useful objective of urban anthropology is to develop an inventory of such units and to develop techniques for the analysis and observation of the interaction that takes place within them.[7] This is a valuable way of approaching the study of culture itself — not at the level of what people *say* about culture, but at the level of what they actually *do*.

Similar questions can be raised about ethnicity. The primary division of all Singaporeans into the four groups of "Chinese", "Indians", "Malays" and "Others" is well known and has been the subject of frequent comment.[8] Why does ethnicity persist as such an important factor in Singapore's socio-cultural make-up? Some explanations can be sought in government policy, but another interesting hypothesis to explore would be the one put forward by a number of urban anthropologists — that urban ethnicity is itself a response to urban complexity, i.e. that it is a consequence of the individual's need to make sense of the large, complex and heterogeneous urban environment; that it anchors relationships in terms of comprehensible social categories; and indeed that it provides the individual with a *resource* for coping with the city. If this hypothesis is correct it means that urbanization, despite its attendant modernization, *promotes* rather than diminishes ethnicity as an identity confering mechanism. There is a great deal of comparative evidence to suggest that this is so — for example that tribalism in African cities is a response to city life and is highlighted in that situation, whereas in the rural areas where people live in a homogeneous cultural setting, the significant cleavages are kinship and politics, and not ethnicity. This would be an interesting thesis to pursue in the Singapore context, as it would involve looking at people's own constructs of ethnic identity, at the relationship between these and government policy, at mechanisms of boundary reinforcement and abandonment, at occupational identities of ethnic groups, at religious, linguistic and ideological factors, at the histories of the individual groups and their interrelationships and at the effects of processes of social change on group identities.

On the subject of ideologies, one might here fruitfully mention that this is a neglected area of study in Singapore. An excess of "pragmatic" thinking has banished such topics to the outer fringes of attention. But in fact the study of ideological systems — political ideologies, symbolic systems, systems of belief and knowledge and religion — is absolutely essential to the understanding of culture. The religious factor, for example, is of major importance in Singapore culture — as an ethnic and social marker, as a determinant of diet, dress, custom and even language, and as a potentially important political problem.[9] Yet virtually no serious research has yet been devoted to such studies, presumably because they are seen as being marginal to the "real" issues of economic and technological development.

No doubt any interested scholar or layman could add many additional items to this list — the study of the external linkages of Singapore society for example, or the almost unique processes of urbanization in Singapore, where urbanization is not a result of in-migration to the city by the rural population, but is "urbanization *in-situ*": one merely sits and waits for urbanization to overtake one wherever one lives on the island. Indeed the few remaining rural populations in Singapore or on the outer islands are all intimately linked with the urban sphere, even if their actual habitat is outside of it.[10] The

empirical research possibilities are widespread, but it is also of interest in conclusion to point to some of the theoretical issues.

As we have already suggested, there is no reason at all to regard urban work as in anyway damaging to traditional anthropological problems and procedures: rather it allows them a hitherto unexpected and enriched scope. Singapre is an excellent location for the urban anthropologist since it is of small size although of high complexity. It thus allows full play to the traditional values of holism and the interdependence of social systems within a society, which are valuable aspects of anthropological method, and at the same time encourages the utilization of techniques from sociology, and the development of altogether new techniques appropriate to the urban context. The Singapore case raises other very challenging theoretical and methodological problems – the question of studying a complex society as a single community; the relations between qualitative and quantitative methods; the validity of traditional theories of urbanization, the rural-urban continuum, the "adaptation" thesis, the role of informal structures, relations between formal social structures and actual social organization; issues of social change; issues of the nature and emergence of culture and questions of urban ethnicity. Singapore is an ideal laboratory for the pursuit of all these questions, provided of course that the unique characteristics of Singapore's society and history are also kept in mind. The situation within anthropology itself need not of course remain static: one of the contemporary challenges to anthropology is the redefinition of its subject matter, or phrased differently, of the objects of anthropological analysis. Need there always be the "primitive", the small-scale, the minutae of culture? Clearly there is a place for these — all human cultures are methodologically equal to the anthropologist – but one of the stimulating features of urban anthropology is that it also points the way out of narrow traditional concerns towards wider perspectives, and perspectives that incidentally are very much a concern of the real and developing world situation.

Notes and References

1. The journal being *Urban Anthropology* which began publication in 1972.

2. Of which there are now many examples, including Richard G. Fox, *Urban Anthropology: Cities in Their Cultural Settings.*, Englewood Cliffs, 1977; Edwin Eames and Judith Granich Goode, *Anthropology of the City*, Englewood Cliffs, 1977; Elizabeth Eddy (ed.), *Urban Anthropology: Research Perspectives and Strategies.* Athens (Georgia), 1968; Aiden Southall (ed.), *Urban Anthropology: Cross Cultural Studies of Urbanization.* New York, 1973; George Foster and Robert Kemper (eds.). *Anthropologists in Cities,* Boston, 1974. There are others, many of which are conveniently cited and summarized in the Eames and Goode volume, and numerous ethnographies based on specific urban situations, also cited in that book.

3. Eric R. Wolf, "Kinship, Friendship and Patron-Client Relations in Complex Societies", in M. Banton (ed.), *The Social Anthropology of Complex Societies.* London, 1968, p. 2.

4. Maurice Freedman, "A Chinese Phase in Social Anthropology". *British Journal of Sociology,* 14, 1963.

5. Burton Benedict, "Sociological Characteristics of Small Territories and their Implications for Economic Development", in M. Banton (ed.), op. cit.

6. For an interesting discussion see the paper by Robert Redfield and Milton B. Singer, "The Cultural Role of Cities", *Economic Development and Social Change,* Vol. 3. 1954.

7. For a Singapore example see David Y.H. Wu, "Cross-Cultural Interaction in Public Places".

Journal of Sociology and Psychology, Vol. 2. 1979, pp. 28-35.

8. See for example G. Benjamin, "The Cultural Logic of Singapore's 'Multi-racialism'," in Riaz Hassan, editor, *Singapore: Society in Transition.* Kuala Lumpur, 1976.

9. See John Clammer, "Religion and Language in Singapore", in Eddie C.Y. Kuo and E.A. Afendras, editors, *Language and Society in Singapore,* Singapore, 1980, reprinted as chapter four of this volume.

10. Riaz Hassan and Michael Walter, "An Island Community in Singapore: A Characterization of a Marginal Society," Sociology Working Paper No. 61. Singapore 1977.

CHAPTER TWO

SINGAPORE CHINESE SOCIETY AGAINST ITS HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Singapore Chinese community is unique in Southeast Asia. It represents the single largest concentration of Chinese in any place (nearly two million individuals), it is the only nation in the region where there is a substantial Chinese majority (76% of the population) and where Chinese exercise political control, and it is highly diversified and internally stratified, not only by class and economic activities, but also by dialect and custom; almost all the significant regional variations and language groups within China being represented and reproduced in the tiny island state. And of course this community, large, stable and economically successful as it now is, is of migrant origin. Even though now over 70% of the Singapore Chinese are locally born, almost 30% were not, and came to the island from China, Taiwan or from places by way of some intermediate place elsewhere in Southeast Asia, and of course the parents, grandparents and in some cases more distant forebearers of all the Singaporean Chinese originated from China in the first instance. This migratory history, and the establishment in Singapore of a stable Chinese community in the midst of a predominantly non-Chinese (and even anti-Chinese) part of the world raises some intriguing sociological questions, the central ones being – what kind of social structure was created, or recreated, in Singapore; how does this social structure relate to that prevailing at the sources of immigration; and what effects did the environment (social, cultural ecological and political) of Singapore have on the establishment of a workable Chinese social organization in this new setting?

This paper sets out to at least begin to answer these questions – or at least to sketch out what a comprehensive answer might look like. It is concerned then primarily with the *effects* of migration or its consequences, conceived sociologically, in the place of destination. It is not concerned (except very indirectly) with the two hitherto classical questions of Chinese migration – the causes of migration and the effects of migration on the sending communities.[1] Clearly then to adequately understand the contemporary social structure of the Singapore Chinese community requires a longitudinal – a historical – analysis, or at the very least requires attention to historical factors. The present paper then is offered as an essay of a socio-historical character with the intention of exploring some of the ways in which the past influences the present organization of the Singapore community.

Chinese society in Singapore stems essentially from three sources – Chinese who settled in the early part of the nineteenth century and engaged in fishing and in the establishment of pepper and gambier plantations; Chinese of a commercial kind, many of whom came to Singapore from Malacca, and who were often Malacca *Babas* or Malay-speaking Chinese often already of long residence in the Straits Settlements; and the great bulk of migrants from South China who came as labourers and artisans, and who were