

**The development of Singapore from 1965 to 1997;**

Best explained by the developmental state model or the historical-institutionalist theory?

Bachelor project 05 – Development and Underdevelopment

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## Introduction

Development is a subject of contemporary interest for both countries that aim to develop from a low-income level as well as countries that have already developed to higher income levels. All countries want to achieve continued development. Singapore, which is regarded as one of the most successful cases of economic development of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, is of interest to countries at different income levels as it very quickly transitioned to an advanced economy (Lim, 2017, p.ix). Self-evidently, Singapore's economic success has drawn attention from scholars, policy-makers and business practitioners throughout the developed and developing world (Lim, 2016). The spotlight was on the economy of Singapore, which took off just within 10 years from 1965 to 1975 and has brought about impressive economic growth (Lim, 2016, p.36). The conventional economic indicators show that Singapore was the most successful economy of the world from the 1960s until the 1980s (Lim, 2017, p.5). The Gross National Product (GNP) growth of the 1960s, 1970s and first half of the 1980s was 10%, 14% and 10% respectively and the annual inflation of the 1960s, 1970s and first half of the 1980s was 1.2%, 5.6% and 8.5% respectively (Lim et al., 1986). Singapore thus had economic growth with price stability with an economic growth rate above the world average and an inflation rate below the world average (Asher, 1984, p.78). Economic growth remained high and stable until the 1997 Asian crisis with growth rates between 6.5% and 11.5% (Haila, 2015, p.3). Starting from an island city-state with few natural resources, Singapore has managed to survive and prosper, and has transformed itself from a Third-World economy into a First-World nation through development.

In the 1990s, it became popular to analyse Singapore together with other rapidly growing Asian economies as a 'developmental state'. The concept of the developmental state was first coined by Chalmers Johnson in his book *MITI and the Japanese Miracle* (1982). It was invented to solve the puzzle of why Asian economies, first Japan and then the four Asian tigers Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore, were growing while Western economies were stagnating (Haila, 2015, p.12). Leftwich (2000), one of the scholars that adopted and adjusted the developmental framework considered Singapore an example of the developmental state model, which explains why some countries develop and others do not. Leftwich explains economic growth by the presence of a specific political context in the form of a specific type of state that is a "function of the politics of these societies and their politico-economic relations with the international system" (2000, p.154). The developmental state model plays down the importance of democracy and addresses the weakness of civil society. A more recent historical-institutionalist theory of Acemoglu and Robinson (2013) explains

development in a dissimilar fashion. This theory argues that political institutions determine the political process and that this political process ultimately constitutes the economic institutions in a state (Acemoğlu & Robinson, 2013, p.42). More prosperous states have had more inclusive institutions through the interplay of critical junctures and institutional drift, so that prosperity could increase in a sustainable way (Acemoğlu & Robinson, 2013, p.429-430). Historical-institutionalist theory emphasizes democracy and pluralism for which a strong civil society is the basis. To find out which theory best explains the development of Singapore, this paper will put both theories on the development of the country to the test. The research question is as follows: Which theory, the developmental state model or the historical-institutionalist theory, best accounts for the characteristics of the development of Singapore from 1965 to 1997?

The relevance of this paper lies in both theories being contradictory in certain areas. Besides, I find it fascinating to compare the more universal historical-institutionalist theory with the developmental state model that is applicable on a smaller scale. I have opted for a timeframe of the development of Singapore from 1965 to 1997. 1965 was chosen as the starting point as this year marks the independence of Singapore. 1997 was chosen as end point as progress and the GNP growth was stalled by the Asian financial crises of 1997-1998 (Lim, 2016, p.6). According to Huff (1994) the three decades that comprise the timeframe may be considered as a whole as the 1960s were basic to the growth that took place until the 1990s (Huff, 1994, p.300).

The first chapter will consist of the methodology. The next chapter explains the theory of the developmental state, sets forth the historical-institutionalist theory, and concludes with a comparison between the both. The third chapter will provide an introduction into the colonial history of Singapore and the build-up to independence in 1965. Singapore has a relatively short but eventful history. The historical context in which the developments took place is fundamental to answering the research question. Hereupon the analysis will follow. The fourth and fifth chapter apply the developmental state model and historical-institutionalist theory to the development of Singapore from 1965 until 1997. The final chapter concludes that the developmental state model accounts for the characteristics of the development of Singapore from 1965 until 1997 best, compared to the historical-institutionalist theory.

### **Methodology**

The method used for this paper is a case study. A case study consists of an exhaustive analysis of an individual case to develop the context within which causal processes can be

understood (De Vauss, 2001, p.50). The case study provides a detailed analysis and further insight on the development of Singapore. This allows to determine which theory best accounts for the characteristics of the development of Singapore. The scope of the findings of qualitative investigation in the form of a case study design is restricted and the findings try to generalize to theory (Bryman, 2016, p.399). Reviewing relevant secondary literature will provide the data. The secondary literature will be comprised of academic books and articles.

It is not my intention to provide a general model of development, but rather to analyse a case that illustrates unique aspects of a given country's development to increase the in-depth understanding of how Singapore's development took place. The complex development process can provide us with lessons as to why this development turned out to be so successful.

To answer the research question which theory best accounts for the characteristics of the development of Singapore from 1965 until 1997 the analysis will focus on their attributes. The developmental state model will be based on the six aspects of Leftwich's (2000) developmental state model, namely the developmental elite, relative state autonomy, presence of meritocratic bureaucracies, deliberately weaken civil society, merger of power, authority and relative autonomy preceding economic development and the suppression of civil rights and degree of legitimacy. Acemoğlu and Robinson (2013) do not present concise aspects of inclusive political and economic institutions. Regarding inclusive political institutions, the operationalisation is based on pluralism. A pluralistic society will be analysed through the party system and the degree of civil society organizations, to determine if there is a fair struggle between different interests of parties in the political arena. Inclusive political institutions give rise to inclusive economic institutions, which secure private property and encourage entrepreneurship. Therefore the analysis of inclusive economic institutions will focus on private property rights and the degree of entrepreneurship in society. By analysing these indicators, it is possible to assert whether the development of Singapore complies with the historical-institutionalist theory. The above-mentioned aspects and points will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

### **Theoretical framework**

Different models that use economic and political factors try to explain the miraculous shift of some developing countries achieving rapid economic growth. Two of those explanations, the developmental state model and the historical-institutionalist theory, will be set out in general terms in this chapter. The leading sources for these theories are derived in

from Leftwich's book *States of Development* (2000) and Acemoglu and Robinson's book *Why Nations Fail* (2013). Adjacent, the two theories will be compared.

### **Developmental state model**

The concept of the developmental state emerged to explain the rapid growth of a number of countries in East Asia in the period after the Second World War (Haggard, 2018). In his book *MITI and the Japanese Miracle* (1982), Johnson argued that the state needed to prioritize on economic development. Johnson's (1982) developmental framework was adopted and adjusted by multiple scholars. One of which was Adrian Leftwich (1995), who argued that "few societies in the modern world will make speedy transitions from poverty without states which approximate this model of a developmental state" (Leftwich, 1995, p.421). Leftwich sets forth an extensive literature review and a comprehensive delineation of the developmental state model in his book *States of Development* (2000).

A high level of economic growth through a longer period of time has only been achieved by a handful of countries. This high level of economic growth was defined by Leftwich as an average annual Gross National Product growth per capita of more than 4% over more than 25 years (Leftwich, 2000, p.3). The handful of countries that have been able to achieve this high level of economic growth in the period from 1965 until 1997 were Botswana, China, Indonesia, Malaysia, South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand and Singapore (Leftwich, 2000, p.153). Leftwich (2000) states that a developmental state is a transitional form that can be defined as follows:

'a state whose politics have concentrated sufficient power, autonomy, capacity and legitimacy at the center to shape, pursue and encourage the achievement of explicit developmental objectives, whether by establishing and promoting the conditions of economic growth (...), by organizing it directly (...), or a varying combination of both' (Leftwich, 2000, p.155)

Development follows from specific politics according to Leftwich (2000). The specific politics of a country regulate the characteristics of a particular developmental state. According to Leftwich, for the most part the political drive for development is raised by nationalism, a strong ideology and a wish to 'catch up' with the more developed countries (Leftwich, 2000, p.154). Due to politics being inconsistent within different countries developmental states also differ from one another (Leftwich, 2000, p.168-169). Leftwich (2000) describes six different aspects that are present in the developmental state model.

The first aspect of a developmental state is their developmental elite. This developmental elite has the purpose in mind to develop and bring about economic growth.

The core of this developmental elite is comprised of small group of politicians and bureaucrats that are close to the head of government of the state. According to Leftwich, for the continued existence of a developmental state, it is essential to maintain the cohesion between the entire elite (Leftwich, 1995, p.405-406). There do exist alternating coalitions with dynamic interests within the developmental elite, yet they all strongly interconnected. The developmental elite is seen as relatively not corrupt as it invests in public property instead of enriching itself (Leftwich, 2000, p.160-161).

The second aspect of a developmental state is its relative state autonomy. Relative autonomy signifies a particular degree of independence from societal interests of class, regions and sectors, which makes for the possibility for the state to supersede these interests and put the national interests first (Leftwich, 1995, p.408). Hence, a state is able to execute the policies needed for development (Leftwich, 2000, p.162). Leftwich states that in developmental states there is 'embedded autonomy' present. This refers to the state being intertwined with other state and non-state actors, instead of being isolated from them. This intertwinement supports the development and implementation of development goals. Nonetheless, other state or non-state actors are pushed aside to ensure economic growth when necessary. Furthermore, developmental states have all relied on foreign financial assistance one time or the other. This led to the developmental states being more autonomous as they did not have to turn to domestic actors for financial resources (Leftwich, 2000, p.162).

The third aspect of a developmental state is the presence of meritocratic bureaucracies. These bureaucracies are strong, professional, independent and competent and must be able to achieve broad economic and social developments (Leftwich, 2000, p.162). According to Leftwich meritocratic bureaucracies are established in developmental states that possess an elite with a developmental determination and a relative state autonomy, which have been mentioned above (2000, p.163). Frequently, specific institutions responsible for implementing development policy are erected. Even only limited to specific economic and developmental policies, this leads to the bureaucrats in these specific institutions being very powerful in comparison to their counterparts in other institutions and in non-developmental states (Önis et al., 1991, p.115). In meritocratic bureaucracies, the bureaucrats are singled out by meritocratic standards, which brings about a high educated workforce with outstanding bureaucratic capabilities that is tightly linked together (Önis et al., 1991, p.115).

The fourth aspect of a developmental state is to deliberately weaken civil society (Leftwich, 2000, p.163). Civil society includes all privately organized groups below the state level but above the family level. Not only for its continuation, but also for the developmental

state to emerge it is essential to have a weak civil society (Leftwich, 1995, p.415). According to Stubbs the presence of a weak civil society make it easier for states to establish a strong bureaucracy capable of implementing policies and easier to control the domestic order (Stubbs, 2009, p.6). Civil society is especially weak in the development of the developmental states as a result of low levels of economic development in rural areas, so there was no capacity or initiative to organize itself (Leftwich, 1995, p.415-416). Be that as it may, it is not uncommon for civil society to strengthen after economic growth has taken place in a developmental state (Leftwich, 2000, p.164). In this rise of civil society the demand for decentralization, individual freedom and democracy increases (Leftwich, 1995, p.416).

The fifth aspect of a developmental state is that before strong economic development began there had already been a merger of power, authority and relative autonomy. This merger made the control of national and international private capital during economic growth possible. In a developmental state the economic policy is intended to expedite the market, in order to promote economic growth (Leftwich, 2000, p.164). There are multiple instruments to shepherd the market on a course towards the promotion of development goals. Through the use of strategic industrial policies a developmental state intends to 'catch up' with the more developed countries. Notwithstanding the importance of the 'catch up' with the more developed countries, according to Weiss (2000) it is important to the developmental state that the growth will be shared equally. There is a strong emphasis on 'sharing the fruits of growth in an equitable manner' (Weiss, 2000, p.26).

The sixth, and final, aspect of a developmental state is the suppression of civil rights in combination with a degree of legitimacy as the material conditions of the population improve (Leftwich, 2000, p.165-166). Opposition is not tolerated and organized action against the state is subdued (Leftwich, 2000, p.165). The suppression of civil rights is necessary to implement the developmental policies that are required to lead to economic growth. The population of a developmental state accepts the suppression of civil rights as they benefit from the economic growth. There was an implicit 'social contract' between government and citizens as material benefits through economic profit would be traded for the suppression of democratic rights for the citizenry (Douglass, 2005, p.544-545). A developmental state has a degree of legitimacy as its citizens enjoyed the economic growth through education, health care and infrastructure (Leftwich, 2000, p.166).

Leftwich (2000) focuses on politics as the requisite for development. In doing so, he disregards the importance of democracy for development. The combination of a developmental state and democracy is unlikely on the grounds that democracy is a

conservative system and development is a process that calls for radical changes within a society. It is unlikely that a democracy will bring development, as its characteristics don't lead to radical changes (Leftwich, 2000, p.174). According to Leftwich there are 'very complicated and potentially compromising structural tensions between the institutions required for stable and consolidated democracy and those required for rapid, effective and sustained growth and development' (Leftwich, 2005, p.686). Leftwich (2000) even states there is a trade-off between democracy and economic development; the institutional characteristics and requirements for democracy and for development pull in opposite directions. Although a combination of both can be problematic, there are instances where they can go together (Leftwich, 2000, p.173). Key is the use of democracy and the design of the state. The dominant party state is the most successful form of democracy for development. A dominant party state has generally got the concurrence necessary to make radical changes. Concluding, Leftwich states that without a developmental state, democratic or not, it is unlikely for any contemporary developing society to achieve developmental breakthrough (Leftwich, 1993, p.621).

### **Historical-institutionalist theory**

Acemoğlu and Robinson (2013) have a contrasting theory about development. According to Acemoğlu and Robinson (2013), states fail to create long-term and sustainable development when they have a lack of inclusive political and inclusive economic institutions. In *Why Nations Fail* (2013), Acemoğlu and Robinson provide a historical-institutionalist explanation for why some states are rich and other states are poor by arguing that the different patterns of economic development of states result from the particular political and economic institutions in a state. The core of the historical-institutionalist theory is that political institutions determine the political process, which ultimately forms the economic institutions in a state (Acemoğlu & Robinson, 2013, p.42). In this way politics and political institutions shape the economic institutions that are decisive for growth and development.

Central for economic growth are inclusive economic and political institutions. Inclusive economic institutions are those that "allow and encourage participation by the great mass of people in economic activities that make best use of their talents and skills and that enable individuals to make the choices they wish" (Acemoğlu & Robinson, 2013, p.75). To the contrary, institutions that are not inclusive will not benefit the total population. A prerequisite for inclusive economic institutions are political inclusive institutions. Political institutions are inclusive when they are sufficiently centralized and pluralistic. Political institutions are pluralistic when power restrictions are imposed and power is widely

distributed within a society, and not in the hands of an individual or small elite (Acemoğlu & Robinson, 2013, p.80). Without these prerequisites of a pluralistic and sufficiently centralized state and a monopoly of legitimate violence it is not possible to impose law and order and society will sooner or later fall into chaos (Acemoğlu & Robinson, 2013, p.81). Institutions that only had a small degree of inclusiveness at the start became increasingly inclusive through so-called virtuous circles, which are processes of positive interaction between political and economic institutions that make inclusive institutions stronger and easier to exist (Acemoğlu & Robinson, 2013, p.332-333). Control mechanisms to prevent abuse and misappropriation of power were produced through inclusive political institutions. These increasingly inclusive political institutions bring about inclusive economic institutions, which make the continuation of inclusive political institutions possible. Under inclusive economic institutions, all the assets are not in the hands of a small elite who can then use their economic power to expand their political power. Inclusive economic institutions spread the assets more evenly over society and hinder the influence of political leaders, so they are inapt to take over the power of the state (Acemoğlu & Robinson, 2013, p.354-355).

In opposition to inclusive institutions there are extractive institutions, which form barriers that eliminate certain groups to enter economic and political arenas. Extractive political institutions limit the possibilities to control the exercise of power, which leads to the use and abuse of power. Extractive economic institutions mean that great wealth and profits can be achieved for those who hold power and thus the economic assets. Those who hold power are then able to establish monopolies and appropriate the property of others (Acemoğlu & Robinson, 2013, p.356). States with extractive institutions are likely to stay in a vicious circle as their elite, who holds the power, is only interested in preserving their power. Institutions that are extractive remain that way through these so-called vicious circles in which negative interaction takes place. Extractive political institutions then bring about extractive economic institutions, who in their turn make the continuation of extractive political institutions possible (Acemoğlu & Robinson, 2013, p.355).

Acemoğlu and Robinson (2013) state that institutions that are already established and entrenched within society are hard to revise. The elite that holds the power within society controls extractive institutions and directly benefits from their extractive nature (Acemoğlu & Robinson, 2013, p.365). Therefore, extractive institutions are enduring. To the contrary, inclusive institutions are equally enduring. According to Acemoğlu and Robinson, the upper portion of society is unable to revise the inclusive institutions towards more extractive institutions due to power restrictions (Acemoğlu & Robinson, 2013, p.308-309). Besides, both

the upper portion of society as well as the bulk of society benefits from a level playing field. There is a possibility to revise already established and entrenched institutions, but it is very difficult. Due to a critical juncture, “an important event or confluence of factors that disrupts the balance in a society”, already established and entrenched institutions can be revised (Acemoğlu & Robinson, 2013, p.101). To revise extractive institutions into inclusive institutions there is the need for a broad coalition of groups that strive for the transformation of the institutions (Acemoğlu & Robinson, 2013, p.427). Vice versa, it is difficult to revise inclusive institutions into extractive institutions due to their internal control mechanisms that counter the exploitation of power by a dictator or small group (Acemoğlu & Robinson, 2013, p.333). This can for the large part be accounted for by a pluralistic society in which power is constrained and widely distributed among the multiple societal groups (Acemoğlu & Robinson, 2013, p.333). Finally, the benefits for a seizure of power are diminished because a dynamic economy has resulted from the inclusive economic institutions in which monopolies are eliminated.

### **Comparison of the theories**

There are some key differences between the developmental state model and the historical-institutionalist theory. The first key difference is their view of civil society. Leftwich (2000) claims the developmental state is to weaken civil society. On the contrary, Acemoğlu and Robinson (2013) claim that civil society organizations play a substantial role for inclusive political institutions by imposing power restrictions and the wide distribution of power in society. These civil society organizations provide a degree of control for the population as they enable them to safeguard their interests. Corruption and the abuse of power are consequently curbed.

The second key difference regards their view on state autonomy and pluralism. Aspects of the developmental state model are the relative state autonomy and the strong meritocratic bureaucracy. This relative autonomy and meritocratic bureaucracy causes the state to be independent of different societal interests, but can focus on their primary goal of development and economic growth. Oppositely, the historical-institutionalist theory emphasizes the importance of pluralism. A virtuous circle can be achieved through a wide distribution of the political power and economic assets over society.

The third key difference is their view on the legitimacy of the one's that hold power. According to Leftwich (2000), a developmental state has a degree of legitimacy as the material conditions of the population improve. The citizens enjoy the economic growth through education, health care and infrastructure and in turn support the developmental state

and its policies. The historical-institutionalist theory explains that the power holders can gain legitimacy of the population through democracy and elections. In the elections that are guaranteed by inclusive political institutions the population determines who has the power.

To answer the research question which theory best accounts for the characteristics of the development of Singapore from 1965 until 1997 the analysis will focus on the attributes of the two theories. Due to the fundamental importance of the historical context in which the development of Singapore took place, the following chapter will first provide an introduction of the colonial history of Singapore and the build-up to their independence in 1965.

### **Singapore's colonial history and the build-up to independence**

Modern Singapore dates from 1819, when the British set up a trading post at the extremity of the peninsula of Malacca (Turnbull, 1989, p.1). The island of Singapore had no natural resources, but nevertheless had a massive influx of people after its founding. Due to this rapidly growing population and due to increased trading, the British were very cooperative towards the inhabitants of Singapore. The focus of the inhabitants of Singapore was on trade and their collective interests were pressed onto the authority. The first British settlers advocated the economic principles of free trade and opposed government intervention to stimulate trade, which was adopted by the entire colony. Singapore grew out to be a regional trading centre with economic institutions that designed to ease and increase free trade. Singapore's economic and strategic relevance grew by the opening of the Suez Canal in 1867. The economic development of Singapore in at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century came in part by a colonial policy focused on economic development and an increase in Chinese workers that provided an increase in trade.

Singapore enjoyed "unbroken peace with orderly administration, and her steady expansion and prosperity were checked only temporarily by periodic international economic depressions", until the occupation by imperial Japan from 1942 until 1945 (Turnbull, 1989, p.76). During the occupation the Singapore economy was largely demolished. When the Japanese occupation had ended, the British army briefly ruled over Singapore until 1946. Hereafter, it was decided to keep Singapore as a British crown colony outside the Malaysian Union. In 1955 the first general election took place. The second general election was held in 1959. This election was won by the People's Action Party (PAP) with an overwhelming majority (Lee, 1998, p.305). The leader of the PAP, Lee Kuan Yew, became the first Singaporean prime minister. In 1963, Singapore declared independence from Great Britain and joined Malaya, Sabah and Sarawak in the Malaysian Federation (Turnbull, 1989, p.285).

In 1965 Singapore left the Malaysian Federation and became a sovereign and independent nation on the 9<sup>th</sup> of August (Von Alten, 1995, p.28).

Upon declaring independence, Singapore was given little chance of a long-term survival, partly due to the military pressure from Indonesia and the tensions with neighbouring countries. Lim (2016) provided a list of economic and political challenges that faced Singapore in 1965 that contained “massive unemployment, a low-skilled workforce, a shortage of industrial as opposed to commercial entrepreneurs, lack of domestic savings, wretched housing conditions, militant labour unions, and racial riots” (Lim, 2016, p.36). To make matters worse, with the Malaysian hinterland no longer available, Singapore had to face these challenges with hardly any natural resources to depend on except for a relatively miniscule land area, a population of about 1.9 million people, a deep-water harbour, and perhaps its favourable strategic geographic location (Tham Seong Chee, 1995, p.2).

Despite the dark outlook in 1965, Singapore passed through a remarkable economic development; the economy took off just within 10 years and has grown unwaveringly since then (Lim, 2016, p.36). I will now analyse the period following the independence in which Singapore transformed itself from a Third-World economy into a First-World nation through development.

### **Analysis of the development of Singapore using the developmental state model**

The initial developmental state framework of Johnson (1982) tried to explain the remarkable economic transformations of the newly industrialized countries of East Asia, which included Singapore. Hereafter there has been an abundance of scholarly research on the paradigm of the developmental state. This chapter contains an analysis of the development of Singapore through the six aspects of Leftwich’s (2000) universal developmental state model.

#### **The developmental elite**

According to Leftwich’s (2000) model, the first aspect of a developmental state is a developmental elite with a purpose in mind to develop and bring about economic growth. Because of a single political party’s dominance over Singapore since 1959, Singapore’s political system has been described from a dominant political system to an authoritarian state (Diamond and Gunther, 2001, p.7-8). Since its win in the second general election, the PAP has steadily increased its hold on the politics of Singapore. The PAP is the only government party of Singapore to date. Even though opposition parties have been part of the political landscape in Singapore since its independence, they have never been in power, had little impact on the decision-making, and their influence in shaping policy agendas was meager

(Mutalib, 2003, p.10). Therefore the PAP dictated the economic course. One of the reasons for the PAP dominance is the ‘first-past-the-post’ electoral system. The following table illustrates the scant electoral results of opposition parties in Singapore.

Table 1

*Electoral performance of Opposition political parties, 1959–1997.*

<b>Year</b>	<b>No of seats contested</b>	<b>% of popular vote</b>	<b>No seats won</b>
1959	51	46,6	8
1963	51	53,04	14
1968	7	15,6	0
1972	57	31,0	0
1976	53	27,6	0
1980	38	24,5	0
1984	19	37,1	2
1988	70	38,3	1
1991	40	40,0	4
1997	36	37,0	2

*Source:* Mutalib, H. (2000). Illiberal democracy and the future of opposition in Singapore. *Third World Quarterly*, 21(2), p.317.

The combination of an extremely weak opposition due to constraints and the PAP clearly excelling over the other parties as a political party and a government in power explains their political dominance (Singh, 2017, p.34). Besides the PAP had the advantage of a charismatic leader in Lee Kuan Yew who “skilfully guided Singapore through its difficult early years”, which earned him a stature that gave him enormous leeway in shaping Singapore’s course (Vogel, 1991, p.74). Lee Kuan Yew excelled as a technocrat and was expertly able to remain in office over a quarter of a century by forging alliances. In retrospect, an overall vision necessary to set Singapore on a solid path of progress can be attributed to him (Vogel, 1991, p.75). The PAP had become synonymous with the government among the people. Lee Kuan Yew acknowledged this with the following words: “I make no apologies that the PAP is the Government and the Government is the PAP” (Mutalib, 2000, p.321).

### **Relative state autonomy**

The second aspect of a developmental state is its relative state autonomy that signifies a particular degree of independence from societal interests of class, regions and sectors, which

makes for the possibility for the state to supersede these interests and put the national interests first. Singapore's government collaborated with social institutions, but their connection was powerless. The government controlled the social institutions and in doing so their influence on policy-making (Khondker, 2008, p.36). According to Huff (1994), the autonomy of the government allowed a strong commitment to economic development. There was a strong identification between the PAP and the majority of the Chinese population around the 1959 general election. However, upon obtaining the political power the PAP split with the local Chinese business class that advocated China. By excluding the local business elite from the decision-making process, the PAP could focus on developmental objectives. The newly installed Lee Kuan Yew government did not envision itself to be 'an outpost of Peking' but as an agent of economic development (Huff, 1994, p.356). By interfering with social institutions, the Singapore government had a certain degree of embedded autonomy. However, it was not shy to overrule the interests of the social institutions to achieve developmental goals.

### **Presence of meritocratic bureaucracies**

The third aspect of a developmental state is the presence of meritocratic bureaucracies. There was a history of meritocratic bureaucracy in Singapore. In 1932 a European noted that in Singapore "the art of governing was left to trained experts" (Turnbull, 1989, p.160). According to Singh the key elemental principle of government policies and directives in Singapore is meritocracy (Singh, 2017, p.63). Lee Kuan Yew and his right-hand man Goh Keng Swee advocated meritocracy as far as to even select political candidates for the PAP from those that stood out most as university students. Besides, skilled professionals were drawn from various professions to form the government and paid amply to make politics attractive to these professionals (Lim, 2016, p.40). Rationality, legal procedures, and meritocracy played an enormous role in the making of Singapore's public policy (Vogel, 1991, p.76). Meritocracy has been of grave importance to a diverse and multicultural state as Singapore. Social stability can be preserved by this system that is not based on race or religion but on efforts and achievements (Tan and Wong, 2016, p.146-147). The accusations of biased treatment due to their ethnic, cultural or religious affiliations can be dismissed through a meritocratic system (Singh, 2017, p.63-64). Due to the great influence of the politics in not only the economy, but in almost all parts of society there was the need for vast and wide bureaucracies. Under the guidance of Lee Kuan Yew Singapore became an 'administrative state' (Vogel, 1991, p.77). The meritocratic approach that was implemented in Singapore worked well in propelling the economy to its heights (Tham Seong Chee, 1995, p.5).

### **Deliberately weakened civil society**

The fourth aspect of a developmental state is to deliberately weaken civil society. For the continuation and emergence of a developmental state it is essential to have a weak civil society, which includes all privately organized groups below the state level but above the family level. There has been a significant shift in the ‘civil society landscape’ of Singapore since 1965 (Tay, 2002, p.72). The first generation of leaders of the PAP diminished the socio-political space of civil society and other forms of political organizations outside of the government (Vasil, 2000, p.50). The government asserted a tight state control over civil society under Lee Kuan Yew from 1965 to 1984. According to Vasil, the PAP had “little interest in the worth of democratic norms, institutions and processes” and tried to establish “a democracy that set limits to the political rights and freedoms of the people and their political and other organisations” (Vasil, 2000, p.50). Subsequently, the Singaporean state had unrestricted right to action, regulation and control, which displays a weakening of civil society. The PAP has applied tight control over its citizenry and civil society to keep political stability, which is considered vital to the survival of Singapore by the PAP (Morgenbesser, 2017, p.210). Only after 1984, there are traces of the emergence of civil society as the style of government became less authoritarian (Singh, 2017, p.100-103).

### **Merger of power, authority and relative autonomy preceding economic development**

The fifth aspect of a developmental state is that before strong economic development began there had already been a merger of power, authority and relative autonomy. As stated above, the political power of the PAP had been extensive since the beginning of the 1960s. With a small population, Singapore had already established a small circle of politicians and bureaucrats who were in close contact with each other during the period of industrialization from 1900 onwards (Vogel, 1991, p.76). What contributed to the formation of a political core that could be able to merge power, authority and relative autonomy was that Singapore gained internal self-government from 1955 onwards and already had an administrative and legislative body in place as a remnant from their colonial past and Singapore being a entrepôt trade center. Through a mass public housing program, family planning policies and industrialization plans that involved an expanding role for the state, the government of Singapore had become a planner, regulator and significant player in the industry by independence in 1965 (Lim, 2016, p.136).

### **Suppression of civil rights and degree of legitimacy**

The sixth, and final, aspect of a developmental state is the suppression of civil rights in combination with a degree of legitimacy as the material conditions of the population improve.

Following independence the PAP government realized a 'social contract' between the government and the population. In this 'social contract' civil rights were traded off against economic growth through state power and political control (Lim, 2016, p.59). The high economic growth made it possible for the PAP government to deliver its promise through public services and public goods and hence legitimizing its power. The PAP was able to deliver and uphold this 'social contract' for the entire period between 1965 and 1997. The success in meeting the basic needs and aspirations of the population generated the persistent support needed to suppress civil rights. The limited freedom of the press in Singapore can be taken as an example. The freedom of the press has been diminished as newspapers were largely owned by the government or government affiliates and the distribution of foreign newspapers was strongly limited. Lee Kuan Yew stated the following regarding limiting freedom of the press: "I needed the media to reinforce, not to undermine, the cultural values and social attitudes being inculcated in our schools and universities. The mass media can create a mood in which people become keen to acquire the knowledge, skills and disciplines of advanced countries" (Lee, 2000, p.190). Likewise, legitimacy is increased by regular general elections as this enables the population to vote freely. The Singaporean electoral system is free enough to provide legitimacy to the government but biased so to ensure the dominance of the PAP (Morgenbesser, 2017, p.212).

### **Reflection**

Singapore from 1965 to 1997 corresponded fully with the developmental state model. There was the presence of a developmental elite that was determined to develop and bring about economic growth in Singapore, which concluded in a PAP dominance that has become synonymous to the government. The state had relative autonomy and although it interacted with, it was independent from societal interests. Singapore was labelled as an 'administrative state' due to the presence of meritocratic bureaucracies. The PAP applied tight control over its citizenry and civil society to keep political stability, therefore Singapore had a deliberately weakened civil society. There had also taken place a merger of power, authority and relative autonomy preceding economic development through the establishment of a small circle of politicians and bureaucrats who were in close contact. Finally, the suppression of civil rights and degree of legitimacy can be attributed to Singapore as there was a 'social contract' between government and population that legitimized PAP rule which made it possible to pursue and achieve their developmental objectives.

## **Analysis of the development of Singapore using historical-institutionalist theory**

The founding and prior growth of Singapore can be compared to Jamestown, Virginia and to Sydney, New South Wales, who are both covered by Acemoğlu and Robinson in *Why Nations Fail* (2013). Jamestown and Sydney were colonies that served as examples as to how inclusive institutions could develop:

“In both cases the initial circumstances did not allow for the creation of extractive institutions. Neither colony had dense populations of indigenous peoples to exploit, ready access to precious metals such as gold or silver, or soil and crops that would make slave plantations economically viable” (Acemoğlu & Robinson, 2013, p.281-282)

The people in power yielded to the pressure of the entire population and the political institutions that determine the political process became increasingly inclusive, which in turn led to more inclusive economic institutions. This course of action did not take place in Singapore, although here too the institutions established by the British rulers left room for the influence of the population and could not be called fully extractive. This chapter contains an analysis of the development of Singapore through four indicators that account for Acemoğlu and Robinson’s (2013) historical-institutionalist theory.

### **Party system**

To assess whether institutions are inclusive, the degree of pluralism is considered. Pluralism is measured firstly through analysing the respective party system of Singapore. This allows to determine whether the political arena contains a fair struggle between the various parties and their interests. As discussed in the previous chapter, since independence in 1965, Singapore has seen the PAP dominate its multi-party system. According to Singh (2017) Singapore’s political system is clearly a one-party dominant system, where only the PAP is capable of winning elections to form a government (Singh, 2017, p.32). Even though there are many opposition parties in Singapore, only a few have repeatedly contested in general elections. The hegemony of the PAP has remained unchallenged due to the opposition parties being unable to establish a presence in parliament (Singh, 2017, p.33-34). Singapore has not even encountered broad-based social movements for demoralisation and political reform (Douglas, 1994, p.560).

### **Civil society organizations**

Pluralism is measured secondly through analysing the civil society organizations in Singapore. As discussed in the previous chapter, the Singaporean state has deliberately weakened civil society and its organizations. The PAP government applied tight control over

the population and civil society to keep political stability. All demands from society were absorbed and there were strict restrictions on civil society organizations (Ortmann, 2015, p.120). Civil society was so heavily curtailed that there was hardly any independent activism. In 1959 the PAP government had successively abolished all forms of political activity. An 'administrative state' had been formed in which, according to Chan Heng Chee, "the meaningful political arena is shifting, or has shifted to the bureaucracy" (Chan, 1975, p.51). The PAP government obtained broad discretionary rights over the registration of any societal organization in 1966 with the passing of a modified version of the Societies Act (Ortmann, 2015, p.124). The PAP remained hostile to an independent civil society that could challenge its monopoly of power, hence its thorough strategies to impose control over all realms of society (Rodan, 1996, p.98-100). The government's control over all instruments and centres of power prevented the growth of political pluralism (Vasil, 2000, p.51).

### **Private property rights**

Property rights can be either intellectual or physical. It is therefore complicated to precisely determine private property rights (Besley, 1995, p.905). In this analysis, private property rights are used to define if economic institutions are of an inclusive type. An effectively working private property system can be beneficial to the economy through entrepreneurial incentive and causing incentives of investment (Demzets 1964, p.18). Demzets states that the price of goods confides on the rights over these goods and the manner in which these rights are enforced; when protected and enforced the value of goods is higher (Demzets, 1964, p.17-18). The legal system of Singapore has been related to the British legal system, the legal traditions, practices, case law and legislation of the colonial power were adopted without deliberation. During the 1970s and 1980s, this remnant grew more and more discomfoting (Tan, 1999). The drive to create a native legal system then gained momentum. The guiding principle in the Singapore legal system was above all to be compatible with the economic conditions, besides the social and cultural conditions. Laws and the legal system were focused on economic survival, by arranging the compatibility with the economic interests and demands of the international community (Tan, 1999). In this respect, property rights were seen as crucial. In order to enhance Singapore's economic aspirations property rights needed to be cared for and controlled.

Intellectual property rights have always been strongly protected in Singapore with its relation to the British legal system, advanced technologies and highly educated population (Deng et al., 1996, p.45). Although Singapore has commenced with significant exclusions from its legislation in 1965, the strength of their intellectual property rights legislation

improved drastically in the 1970s, as did the level of their enforcement of intellectual property rights (Deng et al., 1996, p.48). At the start of the 1990s both were evaluated as above average. The overall level of is considered as moderately good, being said that significant improvements have been made since 1965. The protection of intellectual property rights leads to economic development because protection encourages foreign direct investment, supports the technology transfer necessary for industrialisation, and stimulates indigenous creative research and development work necessary to maintain technological growth (Carter, 1999, p.224). The Singapore government wanted to show developed countries and private enterprises that it did not ignore the legal protection of intellectual property because it relied on foreign trade. An example can be found in Singapore's willingness to amend its Copyright Act in 1987 after negotiations with the USA (Carter, 1999, p.225).

### **Degree of entrepreneurship**

Inclusive economic institutions encourage entrepreneurship in society. According to Woronoff (1992) there were more than enough entrepreneurs in Singapore's society in the form of traders (Woronoff, 1992, p.129). There was a commercial legacy of entrepreneurship that resulted from the colonial days, in which Singapore had a "plethora of government-owned companies in telecommunications, airlines, utilities, ports and shipyards that had to be cultivated and managed upon independence" (Shaw, 1989, p.18). However, the entrepreneurs were in the wrong sector, as they primarily consisted of traders that were largely unwilling to enter much more needed and promising sector of manufacturing which was at an infant stage (Huang, 1989, p.100). Because of this lack of entrepreneurship within its population, Singapore took the path of state-guided entrepreneurship. Singapore imported entrepreneurs in the form of multinational corporations and the government itself became an entrepreneur in a big way (Huff, 1994, p.320). Public enterprises were viewed in the 1960s and 1970s as the main policy and program instrument to execute the economic and social activities of the Singaporean government. The Singaporean government was encouraged to set up public enterprises and to take majority equity stakes in private companies. This led to the government of Singapore's direct presence in the economy by means of multiple public enterprises and statutory boards, which is a form of a public enterprise that is an autonomous government agency set up by special legislation to perform specific functions (Von Alten, 1995, p.198). In its urgency to industrialize and to attract foreign investments after its independence in 1965, the Singapore government paid only scant attention to the country's merchant class and the small but active sector of local manufacturing. As a result Singapore

has had a high degree of state-guided entrepreneurship but did not fully develop its entrepreneurial potential, as the societal entrepreneurship never blossomed.

### **Reflection**

The analysis of the historical-institutionalist theory focused on the four indicators of the party system, civil society organizations, private property rights and degree of entrepreneurship as to determine whether inclusive political institutions and inclusive economic institutions were at the basis of Singapore's economic growth. There was no fair struggle between different interests of parties in the political arena of Singapore. Singapore's political system is clearly a one-party dominant system, where only the PAP is capable of winning elections to form a government. Besides, the government's control over all instruments and centres of power prevented the growth of political pluralism. Although Singapore has commenced with significant exclusions from its legislation in 1965, the strength of private property rights legislation has improved drastically. Finally, Singapore has had a high degree of state-guided entrepreneurship but the societal entrepreneurship never thrived. The large role of the government in Singapore often has an extractive character due to the little influence of the citizenry. However, the resulting prosperity does benefit the city-state and its population, unlike countries with extractive economic institutions as outlined in *Why Nations Fail* (2013). Singapore thus occupies a remarkable middle position between extractive and inclusive institutions.

### **Conclusion**

Starting from an island city-state with few natural resources, Singapore has managed to survive and prosper, and has transformed itself from a Third-World economy into a First-World nation. The small city-state has brought about impressive economic growth from 1965 to 1997. This paper has set out to answer which theory, the developmental state model or the historical-institutionalist theory, best accounts for the characteristics of the development of Singapore? In the analysis, both theories were tested on the Singapore case with sources that are independent of the theories.

After the above analysis of political and economic developments and their consequences for population and society between 1965 and 1997 in Singapore, a clear picture has emerged. It is too simplistic to suggest that inclusive political and economic institutions, as suggested by the historical-institutionalist theory, are the reason for Singapore's remarkable economic growth. The large role of the government in Singapore often had an extractive character due to the little influence of the citizenry. The Singapore case shows that

a strong government that encompasses all facets of society and that has seemingly extractive institutions can still result in economic growth. Singapore has a remarkable mix of extractive and inclusive institutions with a unique relationship between state and economy. The inadequate democratic representation and limited freedoms present in Singapore can be seen as a sacrifice made by the population to preserve its prosperity.

The developmental state model, that is applicable on a smaller scale, considers Singapore as a prime example. It is therefore no surprise that all aspects of the developmental state model were present during the development of Singapore. Economic development was successfully promoted by a determined elite. The individual relationships between the state, society and international actors and the overall structure that contributed to the PAP's effectiveness in propelling Singapore into the modern era concurred with the developmental state model. What was of grave importance was the ability to adjust rapidly through state intervention and guidance due to the state having relative autonomy and the absence of a strong civil society. Recalling the sustained performance of the Singapore economy in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it can be concluded that Singapore became rich because it was already relatively rich, it took advantage of what few advantages it had and because it had good policies. The Singapore government already made this remarkable observation as early as 1963: "Geography and history have conspired to make this island an oasis of progress and plenty in a turbulent and chaotic region of Asia ... human resources [and] an honest administration can turn this into a metropolis to be proud of" (Huff, 1994, p.369). The most general lessons from Singapore's development are a spinoff of the remark of R. Nurkse that "a country is poor because it is poor" and G.M. Meier's later amendment that "a country is poor because of poor policies" (Nurkse, 1957; Meier, 1980).

To answer the research question, the developmental state model best accounts for the characteristics of the economic development of Singapore from 1965 to 1997. In comparison, the more universal historical-institutionalist theory was unable to provide the blueprint for Singapore's development that was achieved by the developmental state model. Singapore is the proof that former colonies can achieve development through transforming into a developmental state that is determined to achieve economic growth and 'catch-up' with more developed countries. Singapore can be seen as an example to others, as the Singaporean model shows that a strong and decisive government that interferes with issues that are regarded as liberties in the Western world is indeed complementary to developing a successful economy.

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