Corporate Culture in Singapore: Chinese Capitalism, Societal Characteristics and Political Economy

Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements of the University of Liverpool for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy by

Raye Ng

June 2011

Corporate Culture in Singapore: Chinese Capitalism, Societal Characteristics and Political Economy

Raye Ng

Abstract

Through interviews and ethnographic fieldwork carried out in Singapore, this research contests conventional approaches to the conceptualisation of corporate culture. This thesis argues how the conception of corporate culture, that focuses on the company's activities, and in particular company rites, rituals and ceremonies, can limit the way corporate culture can be understood. By exploring beyond this conception and incorporating a wider societal, economic and political assessment of the specific location of research, and enabling a more in-depth understanding of the formation of corporate culture, this thesis demonstrates the diversity and fluidity of components that can shape corporate culture. The role of the type of economic organisation (such as Chinese capitalism), societal characteristics and political economy are, it is argued, underemphasised in the literature, with business activities being foremost in accounts of empirical research, without sufficient recognition of the wider significance of social and political features of the specific place. The material practices of everyday lives and action of the individuals at the workplace are discussed, and illustrates how these interactions are clearly situated in particular sites. Consequently, corporate culture may not necessarily be a set of universal or traditional values and takes into account the role of the corporation and its regional spatial form of embedded economic and social practices.

Preface

I want to start with a reflection on my own positionality in this research project. I first completed my Bachelor's degree in Financial Economics (University of Liverpool), and was deeply disturbed by the application of the term *ceteris paribus*[1]. Despite its popular applications, I found neo-classical economics to be rather detached from the real world, and went on to read a MA in Geographies of Globalisation and Development (University of Liverpool). It was there where I discovered, and was greatly fascinated, by the geographical approach to the economy. I began to be hopeful and at the same time, ponder over how different Singapore (my birth country) can be, if viewed from another perspective. From the popular media reports in the West, I sometimes battled to find a voice to truly explain the embeddedness of the local cultural and societal characteristics, and dispel any (mis)understandings of those reports. To me, the answers were all there but I simply struggled to articulate it clearly enough for a Western audience to be convinced. However, it was also through this very same process that I began to see the Singapore economy and society with a critical eye. Consequently, it was with this frustration and thirst for some answers that I embarked on this PhD journey, and to find a non-Anglo-American perspective in my newly adopted academic home. To all intents and purposes, it was an academic pursuit which I endeavour to communicate in an 'objective' voice. However, the issues with being a Chinese diasporan, living and studying in the UK, and researching on Singapore, proved to be challenging, even confusing. Not only did I have to deal with different academic disciplines but I also had to negotiate my own 'Chineseness' and 'Singaporeaness', identity and multi-positionalities as a researcher. It was a

---

[1] Latin for "other things being the same"; an economic assumption holding all other variables constant in order to focus on the specified ones".

double-edged sword; I felt I could decipher observations, etiquettes and social codes that my non-Chinese colleagues may not be able to, but I also worried about the danger of being 'over-enthusiastic' and 'over-representing' the research subjects. Nonetheless, it was a great way to sharpen my analytical skills and it has been a very fulfilling journey. I acknowledge that there is a difference between Asian and Chinese values but for the purpose of this research, they are used inter-changeably to reflect the positionality of the participants, reflecting the identity of Singapore as an Asian and predominantly Chinese society. The Chinese capitalism described in this thesis refers to the economic practices and organisation of Chinese communities outside mainland China. Broadly, this research process has challenged my thinking and reasoning about Economics and Asian Economic Geography. I also wonder if there can be more practical and critical multi-disciplinary research. Perhaps, I may be too naïve (or sceptical) as the assumptions and approach of the disciplines can be hugely varied. Nevertheless, as I return to my academic roots, I am determined to amplify and apply fundamentals of Economic Geography in the field of International Business. Hopefully, there will be more meaningful dialogues between the various academic disciplines, which can be realistically applied in the real world, *ceteris paribus*.

Acknowledgements

It has been a wonderful journey and this project would not have been possible without the following people.

I would like to thank my supervisors Professor David Sadler and Dr Johanna Waters for their incredible patience and wonderful guidance. Your comments, ideas, humour and energy have been crucial in keeping my journey focused.

I am especially grateful to Chris Jones, Tony Novak, Margaret and Tony Jones for always being there. Thank you for the constant motivation and encouragement.

I would like express thanks to my parents for their unconditional love and support.

There are also the academics and friends at University of Liverpool who have contributed to the development of my project through the years. The conversations and discussions have been invaluable; keeping me inspired and challenging my thoughts. It is not possible to list you all but there are a few people I would like to mention here; Jeanette, Steph, Ivo, Andy, Helena, Suzanne, Mark, Karen, Kim and David H. Furthermore, this process was made more enjoyable with the support my friends: Adam, Mish, Roz, Pramodh, Jessica, Charlotte, Laura, Josh, Siobhan and Luigi. I would also like to thank Clare for the laughter and patience over the last few months of completing this thesis.

Finally, I would like to thank all those who participated in my fieldwork. It is not possible to name you all but your involvement has been vital, and also an inspiration to the completion of my thesis.

Raye
June 2011
Liverpool

Contents

Abbreviations

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
APEC	Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation
CAAS	Civil Aviation Authority of Singapore
CC	Community Centre
CCC	Citizens' Consultation Committee
CPF	Central Provident Fund
EDB	Economic Development Board
EOI	Export Oriented Program
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
GIC	Government of Singapore Investment Corporation
GLC	Government Linked Corporation/ Company
GRC	Group Representation Constituency
HDB	Housing Development Board
HUDC	Housing and Urban Development Board
JTC	Jurong Town Corporation
LTA	Land Transport Authority
MAS	Monetary Authority of Singapore
MIA	Ministry of Information and the Arts
MNC	Multinational Corporation
MTI	Ministry of Trade and Industry
MRT	Mass Rapid Transport
NCB	National Computer Board
NPB	National Productivity Board
NPP	New Population Policies
NSTB	National Science and Technology Board
NTP	National Technology Plan
NTUC	National Trades Union Congress
NWC	National Wages Council
PA	People's Association
PAP	People's Action Party
PSA	Port of Singapore Authority
PSB	Productivity and Standards Board
RC	Residents' Committee
SDF	Skills Development Fund
SDU	Social Development Unit
SEA	Southeast Asia
SFPPB	Singapore Family Planning and Population Board
SISIR	Singapore Institute of Standards and Industrial Research
SME	Small and Medium Sized Enterprise
STPB	Singapore Trade Development Board

Chapter 1

Introduction: Why explore corporate culture in Singapore?

"The growth of firms and national economies depends on the successful commercialisation of really new products and services...

And, according to research, the *strongest driver* of radical innovation across nations is the corporate culture within firms...

Factors such as measures of government regulation and country-level labour, capital and culture seem to be less important for driving radical innovation than has been argued. Corporate culture is a more significant driver; so national attempts to spur innovation from the top down are doomed unless firms foster a culture of innovation from within." [emphasis added]

(*The Economist*, 12 Jan 2009, 'Corporate Culture Drives Radical Innovation')

"We are in uncharted waters. We must recondition our corporate culture and we need to reconnect...

... focusing solely on quarterly profits increases was 'the dumbest idea in the world'."

(*Financial Times*, 12 May 2009, 'In Conversation With Jack Welch')

In the sprint to achieving corporate success, corporate culture has become an increasingly pertinent issue, and many business gurus frequently use the term as part of their everyday management speak. From the quotes above, it is evident that corporate culture is now an important feature of remedying ailing companies and responsible for the rise of successful companies too. However, what is corporate culture? Broadly speaking, corporate culture is generally viewed as the norms, customs, standards, and 'rules of the game' underlying social interaction within the firm (Schoenberger, 1997). These norms are linked to principal values that provide more general guidance in shaping the company's image and reputation. The culture identified with shared meanings and assumptions, is often expressed through symbols, rituals, myths and ceremonies (see Schein, 1992; Kotter and Heskett, 1992; Trice and Beyer, 1993; Ouchi, 1981; Deal and Kennedy, 1992). Although corporate culture and corporate performance are mentioned collectively, there is still a fuzzy approach as to how corporate culture should be, and can be addressed.

In a CNN Small Business Programme (broadcast in Nov 2009), corporate culture was explained by several Chicago business entrepreneurs as a type of marketing and branding exercise to achieve, and sustain competitive advantage. They reflected on their recent business activities, and how they shifted their corporate culture in response to recent environment campaigns - urging businesses and firms to be more engaged with environment-friendly initiatives. In another example, an entrepreneur explained how he was trying to emulate the corporate culture of Toyota in his small-sized business – to eliminate waste and stay lean. It is clear that corporate culture is a contemporary and relevant issue. However, they seem to be addressing different

components of corporate culture, ranging from marketing, branding, recruitment, strategy and operations management. Arguably, the genuine purpose and significance of corporate culture may have been (mis)interpreted variably by business practitioners and academics.

To most economists, the firm (or company) is viewed simply as a set of production units responding to competitive initiatives and fluctuation in costs. Conveniently, the firm is a 'black box' that converts inputs into outputs according to specified market demands. The firm is thus widely held to embody the capitalist logic of profit maximisation (Coe *et al*, 2007), and it is argued (see Ohmae, 1990; Dicken, 2003) that we are moving towards a homogenised global corporation discourse with shared best practice standards. However, this global convergence in corporate practices is celebrated in the media without exploring the diversity and complexities of firms in different countries and regions.

Geographers, in contrast, tend to focus on the specificity and uniqueness of places (see Castree *et al*, 2004; Hudson, 2001; Coe *et al*, 2007). A geographical approach to the economy seeks to understand the elements of uniqueness that arise in particular places. The characteristics of places are unique assemblages of a wide array of political, economic, social and cultural factors. So, whilst economists are searching for universal applications, geographers are seeking to understand why certain things happen in specific places in the context of all the richness and complexity of that place. In these places, firms become embedded in close vertical and horizontal relationships with other nearby firms, and within a rich, thick local-institutional matrix that supports and facilitates the functioning of the firms (Gertler, 2001). The ability of

firms in such places to function efficiently is based on shared language, culture, norms and conventions, attitudes, values, expectations which generate trust and facilitate the all important flow of tacit and proprietary knowledge between firms (see Grabher, 1993; Amin and Thrift, 1994). Consequently, a set of characteristic practices emerges and rapidly spreads to firms within the region, becoming a part of the shared conventions characteristic of the local production cluster (Storper, 1997). However, 'place' can be a vague notion, and is simply a defined site for exploring idiosyncrasies that have developed over time (Castree *et al*, 2004; *Coe et al*, 2007). It can refer to anything from a shop or street, to a region, a country, or a continent. There are different sized units that might constitute places, and provide an organising framework for understanding these units by using the language of scale. This provides us with a typology for describing the various scales that are at work; global, macro regional (such as ASEAN), national, regional (such as North West England), local (such as City of London) and lived places, for example workplaces and homeplaces (see Castree *et al*, 2004; Coe *et al*, 2007). This suggests that if we represent one scale as the defining container for understanding a phenomenon, we may indirectly ignore the processes that operate at other scales. An emphasis on the global scale would obscure or underemphasise the factors on the national scale, and vice versa. It is, therefore, important to remain conscious of the ways in which scale is being represented (or ignored) in accounts of economic processes. An important part of a geographical approach is the awareness of how economic processes are constituted at multiple scales simultaneously. In this research, some of the literature I discuss emerges from Asian economic geographies (see Yeung, 1994, 1998, 2004; Nonini, 2003; Mackie, 2003; Lim, 2000; Hamilton, 2004) which consider Asia as a region, and nation-state as a place. Other practice-based geographical studies such as Crang (1994) and

McDowell (1997), look at specific workplaces as separate places. Gertler's (2004) study of workplace practices illustrates the national differences in work culture. Different norms of ownership and control can be seen to exist across national boundaries, resulting from the institutional and historical legacy contexts. In this thesis, firms are seen as (work)places, which are also influenced by the nation-state. It is an ensemble of material objects, workers and firms, and systems of social relations embodying distinct culture, multiple meanings, and practices.

In this thesis, I explore how corporate culture can be understood and conceptualised through a collective grouping of firms in Singapore. In section 1.1, I discuss the context of this research and outline the key research aims. In section 1.2, the key research questions are addressed and the approach to tackling these questions is discussed. Finally, section 1.3 will outline the thesis structure.

1.1 Research Context

In the search for a more complete approach towards understanding corporate culture, and avoiding a 'black box' method of viewing corporations, this study explores a place-specific corporate culture. Hence, this research project situates itself in discussions around corporate culture in Singapore. Singapore is one of the hubs of the corporate world in Southeast Asia. It is an immigrant city consisting of 4.5 million people of whom 75% are Chinese, 14% Malays, 8% Indians and 3% Caucasians (www.gov.sg). The essential feature of Singapore's economic development as a colony was entrepôt trade. This function consolidated Singapore's position as the commercial centre in the peninsula in the 1950s. By the 1960s, it produced a third of the world's rubber and had the largest oil storage, blending, packing and bunkering

base in SEA (Huff, 1994). The Royal Dutch Shell group set up its Far Eastern headquarters in Singapore and Caltex began operating in the country. The trading culture also promoted strong infrastructure and this is reflected in the improvements in the port facilities as well as the then Paya Lebar airport (Regnier, 1991). Trading was based on a short-term outlook as well as new management skills. The manufacturing sector was very much export-oriented and international capital was highly encouraged by the government. Given the specific historical legacy, economic development and geo-political situation of Singapore, it provides a fertile ground for investigating how corporate culture can be shaped.

"Colonial Singapore thrived not simply on trade but on free trade" (Perry *et al*, 1997, p. 55). Free trade was not only the lifeline of colonial Singapore but also the "ideology behind its governance" as free trade promotes a *laissez faire* economy (Lee, 1989, p. 8). This usually means that private enterprise is the engine of growth and that the state should leave community development to the hands of the free market. However, this *laissez faire* attitude was not followed up by the People's Action Party (PAP) government. The PAP made deliberate and radical changes in this socio-political context and advocated state planning of housing and environment in the city. The colonial government practiced a hands-off attitude towards education. State intervention in the medical and health services during the colonial era was also limited. While colonial government ran several hospitals, it was still inadequate in meeting the demands of the population. The Chinese community ran its own medical institutions to supplement the existing health services. The *laissez faire* style practiced by the colonial government facilitated a productive trading system but did little for the socio-economic development of the city (Perry *et al*, 1997). This was all to change

when Singapore gained independence in 1965. The initial stage of independence, between 1965 and 1972, saw policies and programmes to tackle major socio-economic problems such as racial tensions, unemployment, housing and public health issues (see Regnier, 1991; Rodan, 2001). The nation building exercise thus started with state-directed planning in almost all aspects. Nonetheless, the colonial legacy included a high standard of justice and efficiency. The civil service was highly trained and experienced. The present legal system has its foundations in English law. The parliamentary democracy in Singapore is generally accepted as a legacy of the British colonial administration. There are four official languages in Singapore; English, Chinese (Mandarin), Malay and Tamil. The most common medium of communication, however, is English. Thus, the colonial legacy that remains is one that is supportive of future growth, through its impact in developing efficient systems of government administration, establishing trade networks and building industrial capacity and infrastructure, whilst still searching for its own identity as a nation-state in the region.

Capitalist organisations and patterns of economic relationships exist in a world of rapid political-economic change. Nonetheless, patterns of social and organisational structuring form different business systems that make up the reasonably stable and durable patterns of business practices in various localities and societies. Once established in a particular institutional context, these business systems may eventually develop considerable cohesion and even become resistant to major changes (Yeung, 2004). However, in the process of economic globalisation, this is increasingly contested. Furthermore, powerful changes and dynamic processes of internationalisation and globalisation do leave an impact on the Asia-Pacific and key

participants, especially with the scale of China and India. In relation to the discussion of processes of economic globalisation, mainstream Anglo-American discourse and perspective on corporate culture needs to address this complex landscape of political economies and economic organisation (such as Chinese capitalism) in the Asia-Pacific region. This is one of the main reasons why I undertook this research project, and in the process, I hope to illustrate the value of place specific case studies – in this instance Singapore – not only in their own right but also as offering new insights to more general debates concerning corporate culture.

One of the distinctive features of Singapore's development since independence has been the role of government and the state in leading, and supporting the society's development. The campaign to sustain competitive advantage in the region was taken by the government through the creation of the Economic Development Board (EDB). In August 1961, the EDB, which is directly answerable to the Minister of Finance, launched a massive investment drive to ensure that Singapore diversified its economic base and joined the 'second industrial revolution' (Hwa, 1991). Between 1961 and 1964, the investments were valued to be approximately SGD$870 million. The funds were directed at economic development (58%) and social development (40%), both of which were to launch Singapore's subsequent rapid, economic growth and social development (Hwa, 1991). The fact that social development was given such a large slice of this investment highlighted Singapore's realisation that the quality of its population – its health and education in particular – were to be key foundations for its development (Gopinathan, 1991, p. 275). Lee *et al* (1991), in particular had drawn attention to the way in which the Singaporean government saw population issues as a key factor in its development:

"Because of their political and economic implications, population changes in Singapore are viewed seriously by the government. An island with no natural resources other than its harbour, Singapore has depended on its own labour force for economic development, which has been spectacular over the last two decades: In 1987, the per capita gross national product was US$7 410, second in Asia only to Japan, and higher than Italy and Spain. On health and other quality-of-life indicators, Singapore has also done well. The 1987 infant mortality rate was 9.3 per 1000 lower than that of the United States (10.5), the United Kingdom (9.4) and West Germany (9.5), and life expectancy at birth was 73 years. Most Singaporeans live in modern government-subsidised apartments, and the island has extensive highways and a new mass transit system."

(Lee *et al*, 1991, p. 66)

State led policies have been widely recognised as having a marked impact on Singapore's subsequent prosperity with per capita incomes rising every year from US$306 in 1960 to US$2,316 in 1977 (Hwa, 1991, p. 193) and by 2001 it was US$33,551 (Ministry of Information, Communications and Arts, 2002, p. 61). According to the International Monetary Fund, the GDP per capita (current prices) was estimated to be US$40,366 in 2010 (International Monetary Fund, 2011). Arguably, the scale of such progress is a result of the role of the state in the economic development process, and contributes to the people's trust in the government. The relationship between the people of Singapore and the state is an intense one, and has an effect on how the individuals carry out their everyday lives in the corporate place, and shaping corporate culture.

According to Schoenberger (1997), corporate culture is commonly regarded as the norms and 'rules of the game' within the firm. Within debates on the concept of the firm (see Dicken and Malmberg, 2001; Maskell, 2001; Taylor and Asheim, 2001), the lack of a theoretical framework for the concept of the firm in the field of economic

geography is frequently highlighted. Furthermore, underlying this debate is an Anglo-American perception of economic geography (Yeung and Lin, 2003). So, in order to explore and offer depth to the existing debate, a more rigorous and yet place sensitive concept of the firm in economic geography is needed. Moreover, Yeung and Lin's (2003) broader call for theorising economic geographies of Asia reinforces the need for other perspectives, especially in a place specific context. So, in order to start conceptualising corporate culture, we need to investigate where exactly the firm is physically located, reinforcing the 'situatedness' and 'embeddedness' discourse analysis. My response to these issues is to argue that in order to understand and perhaps construct some theories (in economic geography) based in Asia, it is important to understand the actors and agents (such as firms, corporate practices, role of the government and the attitude of labour). At times these discourses and conceptualisations are expressed through dualisms that might encompass a wide breadth of issues, for example, self and other, difference and unity, local and global. An increasingly common quality within these geographies stems from the acknowledgement that all knowledges are constructed from a particular place. They are researched and written by people who are working from specific personal and academic positions. This has been the case especially for Western (Anglo-American) academics and it has been acknowledged that research choices are culturally and politically situated (Barker, 2000). Anglo-American geographers share a common, dominating socio-economic system – western capitalism. This has influenced the development of different types of geographic theory and the recognition of different research subjects common to the capitalist societies in these countries. According to Panelli (2004), geographies being written beyond Anglo-America are more often considered within studies of (economic) development and (postcolonial) political and

cultural geographies. However, in recent debates on contemporary economic geography, there is room for a multiperspectival dimension of the economy to be examined (see Yeung and Lin, 2003; Coe *et al*, 2007). In my research project, I conducted my fieldwork in Singapore and examined how corporate culture is being (re)produced and (re)shaped in the Singapore economy. I explored this through the activities and routines of the people in the working environment; offices, corporate functions and work-related events.

The elements that influence corporate culture extend beyond the corporations, and also include external factors such as the government, the political economy and geopolitical situation. Hence, I examine the business environment through social and cultural lens; uncovering and investigating corporate culture. This thesis unpacks the ongoing debates on the elusive concept of corporate culture. What makes up corporate culture? The literature is drawn from writers such as Schein (1985, 1999), Deal and Kennedy (1982, 1999), Schoenberger (1997), Martin (2002), Alvesson (2002) and O'Donovan (2006). The present literature covers the corporate culture witnessed in large companies based in the West, predominantly in the Anglo-American world. Arguably, they offer a limited perspective of corporate culture, and there is little interdisciplinary exploration on the corporate culture that can exist in a different region, within a different economic organisation, and on a different scale.

In this thesis, I also discuss issues surrounding corporate culture that have been addressed by writers across the various disciplines within the social sciences, especially management sciences. It is my intention to make some connections between the disciplines and as Gertler (2003) suggests, work towards a more complete

framework for conceptualizing corporate culture. The main issue between the disciplines is the perspective in conceptualising corporate culture. Writers from management sciences present an understanding of how to manage corporate culture within the firm in order to change it to obtain optimal productivity and efficiency (see Schein 1985, 1999; Deal and Kennedy, 1982). Human geographers look into the processes and historical development of cultural actions and practices behind corporate culture (see Gertler 2003; McDowell, 1997; Glasmeier, 2001). I think there is room to build some links between these disciplines and extend the discussion of corporate culture to a different place (and at a different scale), within the context of a specific nation state (for example, Singapore), and economic organisation (such as Chinese capitalism). Besides understanding how managing corporate culture is useful in obtaining optimal efficiency, the question of how corporate culture can be shaped and influenced by the political and cultural characteristics of the economy can also be queried. Hence, corporate culture can also be seen as a social process, which can carry itself across national boundaries, and can be affected by the local political, social and cultural peculiarities.

In this study, I also look at how social, cultural and political features can affect corporate culture. These themes are then further explored in the thesis to reflect the interconnectedness and interlinked dynamics between culture and the economy. Indeed, culture is embedded in the economy and the economy is very much a part of culture (Sayer, 1997). There are many perspectives to examine from and this will generate many possible explanations and questions. Nonetheless, in presenting some of the latest scholarship, and linking with the past, the 'cultural turn' has indeed reshaped, rather than replaced, the traditional issues of enquiry (production,

circulation and exchange) in society (Wills and Lee, 1997). Corporations can be seen as a site for cultural processes as much as economic processes. So, it is apparent that culture and the economy have very closely inter-linked and inter-twined relationships. Dynamics of power, resistance, identities, social positioning and processes of valuation all melt together to shape corporate culture (Schoenberger, 1997). For the purpose of this research, I examine how corporate culture can be affected by Chinese capitalism and the political economy of Singapore. I explore the main components that form the corporate culture of the economy; employees, employers and governmental agencies. The first research aim is to examine the key influences and practices that shape corporate culture in Singapore. The theoretical considerations, core influences and practices are explored in chapters 2, 3 and 4. They are then revisited in the empirical chapters for further evaluation. The second research aim is to contribute an Asian perspective to discussions within economic geography. This involves application of a place-based research onto a predominantly Anglo-American literature of corporate culture and economic geography.

1.2   Key Research Questions

Having introduced the research rationale for this study, I now want to highlight the main research questions of this project and briefly outline how this thesis addresses them.

1. Is there a distinctive corporate culture in Singapore?

In chapter 2, I unpack the notion of corporate culture, and evaluate a more complete framework and inter-disciplinary exploration on the conceptualisation of corporate culture. In this thesis, I apply these theoretical considerations (Deal and Kennedy, 1992; Schoenberger, 1997) and use evidence from the fieldwork to explore if there is

a unique corporate culture in Singapore. Theoretical debates on cultural dimensions (Hofstede, 1990) and national business systems (Whitley, 1992) are also explored to evaluate the corporate culture in Singapore.

2. How do economic organisation and business practices affect corporate culture in Singapore?

In chapter 3, I explore the business practices and economic organisation (in this instance, Chinese capitalism) that is being practised in the region and Singapore. According to Folk and Jomo (2003), the key features of Chinese businesses can shape the relationship between firms, and social and political networks. The theoretical discussion in this thesis will evaluate how such features may shape 'the way things are done' in the workplace. The effects of the economic organisation, societal characteristics and business systems (see Yeung, 2004; Whitley, 1992) are further discussed in the empirical chapters to reflect their influence on corporate culture in Singapore.

3. What are the significant features of the Singapore nation building process, and to what extent have they shaped corporate culture?

In chapters 3 and 4, I explore aspects of the nation building in the region and Singapore. According to Suryadinata (2004), the nation building process in Southeast Asia countries has been a long and difficult process. However, the issues are multi-layered and can affect the economic and social development (Tan, 2003; Surydinata, 2004, 2005). This, I argue, can affect how people carry out the rites, rituals and ceremonies at the workplace. Also, in the exploration of the political economy and nation building of Singapore, I evaluate how political and institutional processes can

leave a certain legacy on the people and government. Using empirical data, I discuss how effects of the political and institutional development can influence corporate culture in Singapore.

1.3   Thesis Structure

In chapter 2, I explore the notion of corporate culture. Corporate culture has often been used as a buzz word in the corporate world but very much overlooked in academic literature. The concept of corporate culture is frequently used as a mechanism for reaching optimal productivity (Deal and Kennedy, 1982; Schein, 1985; Martin, 1992; Schoenbeger, 1997). The stronger the corporate culture, the better the performance, or so it is assumed. Business practitioners are interested in the management of corporate culture whilst academics are concerned with the conceptualisation of corporate culture. In this chapter, I take a closer look at the meaning and origins of corporate culture and emphasise how it is both a product of its social-cultural-institutional environment, and also a reflection of the firm's own path of development, including the influences of its workers and managers. I first look at how corporate culture is seen by business scholars and how it is being interpreted in management literature (see Deal and Kennedy, 1982; Hofstede, 1990, 2010). The literature provides a general conception of how corporate culture is constructed, which focuses mainly on the performance of the firm. Then, I look into how corporate culture inter-relates with corporate leadership (see Schein, 1985). This demonstrates how the construction of corporate culture is a multi-layered process. I argue that besides taking into account the rites, rituals, symbols and artefacts of the everyday life in the corporate arena, it is important to take into consideration other socio-economic factors and experiences outside the workplace, such as geo-political situation, nation-

building process, and the variety of capitalism it is situated in. I argue corporate culture is not just about the 'way things are done' but has to incorporate a wider framework of where the firm is situated, including the experiences of the individuals and historical legacies of the region, which are seldom explored in the current literature on corporate culture.

In chapter 3, I discuss the type of capitalism that is being practised in the Southeast Asia (SEA) region. This has rarely been included in discussions of corporate culture and I argue that it will provide a more complete understanding of the concept of corporate culture, and how it can be shaped in this kind of economic organisation. The main contribution of this chapter will also be to query the evolving concept of Chinese capitalism, especially in a region such as SEA. In the past few centuries, millions of ethnic Chinese people in East and Southeast Asia have engaged in a unique form of economic organisation through which an informal group of Chinese merchants, entrepreneurs, traders, financiers and their closely-knit networks of family associates and friends came to dominate the economic realm of the host economies, where they eventually settled. Consequently, this particular form of economic organisation, due to the diaspora of ethnic Chinese, has evolved and dramatically adapted to the various different institutional contexts and political-economic conditions in the host Asian economies (see Redding, 1990; Folk and Jomo, 2003; Hamilton 2004; Yeung 2004). The historical migration patterns have a definite impact on the development of the nation-state in the region. The sheer range and prowess of the economic activities controlled and coordinated by these ethnic Chinese have enabled some of them to become the very foundations of the Asian economies which they inhabit (Yeung, 2004). To some observers, the business practices in Asia are characterised by the

differentiated role of 'inward-looking' inter-firm networks, excessive reliance on personal relationships in business transactions and the strong intervention of the state (Redding, 1990). Chinese capitalism is not nation-specific, but there can be a clear distinction between Chinese capitalism in and out of China. However, for the purpose of this research, the Chinese capitalism I am referring to will be specific to the Chinese diaspora outside China.

The significance of state-building projects by local political elites in Southeast Asia and control over capital (not just the stereo-typically nature of Chinese-controlled capital), reflects a vital political and economic concern (Suryadinata, 2004). The transition from the colonial order to post-colonial regimes saw the relocation and also dislocation of Chinese businesses (Rivera, 2003). This is even enhanced by the increasing unpredictability of the new (political) environment. This resulted in hyper anxiety and lack of trust between the businesses and the local political elites (Folk and Jomo, 2003; Yeung, 2004). In response, Chinese business network organisations began to help organise the distribution of credit and facilitated a kind of networked flexibility that linked and supported individual firms in the context of weak formal market and political institutions (Folk and Jomo, 2003). Hence, the understanding of the economic organisation (Chinese capitalism) can deepen the knowledge of corporate culture.

Chapter 4 explores the political economy of Singapore. By looking at the past, we can better understand the system and structure of the Singapore economy today. The chapter will shed light on Singapore as a developmental state, account for its political background, illustrate the legacy left by colonial administration and the rapid

17

economic transformation that took place within a relatively short period. This highlights the reasons why and how the government took on a particular role in the development of Singapore. Key components of the domestic economy are in full or partial public ownership and subject to government advice and direction (Perry *et al*, 1997). Economic development has been closely coordinated between senior ministers and civil servants (Rodan, 2001). In the pursuit of economic growth, Singapore has adopted a Western style of management that suited the local conditions. A democratic system was in place but individual freedom (such as freedom of speech) was restricted, and the workers' union (National Trade Union Congress) served more as a recreational organisation rather than one that fought against the employers (see Coe and Kelly, 2002). The emphasis on building a stable state and providing rapid economic growth is consistent with the model of a developmental state. Understanding the political economy can further enhance the discussion and conceptualisation of corporate culture in Singapore.

In chapter 5, I discuss the research design for this thesis. I reflect on the complexities of my positionality in this research project. Being both an insider and outsider placed me in a complicated but exciting situation. Being an insider gave me invaluable access to information and also being able to interpret those data (as an insider) was crucial. However, I also had to grapple with being categorised as an outsider (or rather 'banana[1]' or 'potato[2]'). However, having this outsider 'persona' allowed me to have substantial access to both the local and non-local participants whilst in the field. Also, being able to interpret data as both outsider and insider was vital to the success of this research. In this chapter, I also reflect on the kind of data I use and why I use them for

---

[1] A term used to describe a Chinese person who thinks and acts like a Caucasian person.
[2] A term used to describe a non-Caucasian who prefers a Western lifestyle (often referring to having a preference for Western food to non-Western food).

the purpose of this research. The use of official information and company policies were compared with the actions and activities at the corporate environment. The use of language is also reflected upon in this chapter, and this will provide a better understanding to the empirical chapters to follow, especially on how the boundaries between formal and informal business practices can be blurred. In chapter 5, I also examine and reflect on the background of the companies and individuals I observed and interviewed. The nature of the companies and the experience of the interviewees were crucial in the construction of corporate culture in the setting where the fieldwork took place. The discussion also sheds light on how the cultural embeddedness, corporate environment and nature of this developmental state may affect the corporate culture. The complexity and interaction between society and individuals are clearly marked out in the corporate environment. The background to how and why 'things are done here' is examined in chapter 5 to provide a clearer setting to the following empirical chapters.

Chapter 6 discusses key features of the Singapore nation building process and how they can be significant in the shaping of corporate culture. In chapter 4, I examined the development of Singapore with particular focus on the state, economy and labour. In doing so, I identified significant characteristics in the nation building process. The government played an important role in shaping the progress of the developmental state. Mechanisms such as 'permitted' languages to be used in media and education system, public campaigns promoting a multi-religion society, national service (civil defence force, police, navy, army and navy) all played a part in forming the institutional structures of the society. These characteristics may be common to the Southeast Asian region but they are particularly important in the shaping of the

Singapore we see today. Also in this chapter, I discuss the impact of the national service experience upon the corporate environment. National service has a definite and major effect on the Singapore societal culture. This inevitably leaves a footprint of varying intensity, upon the corporate culture of Singapore. The impact of a dominant one party rule, regimental labour regime, national education system, national service and class formation all contributed to the shaping of corporate culture in Singapore. The people are 'manufactured' in this particular framework and characteristics of this structure may be transferred to their work places. I use data from my fieldwork and examine how these political and institutional processes have influenced corporate culture in Singapore. Using extracts from my interviews and observation at company social and official functions, I discuss how language and some of the embedded societal practices have been transported into the corporate place and in the process, shaped corporate culture.

Chapter 7 examines how Asian values, Confucianism, education, *guanxi* (interpersonal relationships) and *mianzi* (face) can influence the shaping of corporate culture. The Asian values system also has a huge impact on the way in which the population perceive formal education (see Mitchell, 1997; Waters, 2008). Their own educational background and that of others become part of their personal characteristics within the corporate environment. The embedded cultural traits in the workforce shape the way the individuals carry out their tasks at the workplace. This chapter argues that Deal and Kennedy's (1982) model of corporate culture does not put enough emphasis on the societal characteristics and socio-economic factors that affect the myths, rituals and ceremonies in the corporate environment. I argue that the shared meanings and assumptions of the employees are significantly influential in

informing the corporate culture. Using the data from fieldwork, I illustrate how Asian values, education, Confucianism, *guanxi* and *mianzi* have a direct and significant influence on corporate culture. In the concluding chapter, I draw the discussion of this thesis to a close and discuss its theoretical implications, and ideas with respect to future research.

Part One

Theoretical Foundations

Chapter 2

Corporate Culture

"Corporate culture is generally viewed as a set of social conventions embracing behavioural norms, standards, customs, and the 'rules of the game' underlying social interactions within the firm."

(Schoenberger, 1997, p. 116)

"Corporate culture is an organic group phenomenon whereby tradition passes on acquired learning to successive generations whilst innovation builds capacity to evolve with environment... corporate culture is visible in attitudes, behaviours and artefacts..."

(O'Donovan, 2006, p. 45)

2.1   Introduction

Corporate culture is often described as one of those 'things' that is difficult to express distinctly, but everyone knows it when they sense it (O'Donovan, 2006). For example, the corporate culture of a large, for-profit corporation, a hospital and a university are different from one another. Arguably, one can observe the corporate culture of an organization by examining the aesthetics and activities of the company; from brand management, marketing techniques, company values to arrangement of furniture, office layout and company events (Brown, 1995; Alvesson, 2002; Johnson *et al*, 2008). Corporate culture is a particularly nebulous topic; trying to capture corporate

culture is made even more difficult by the peculiarities of corporations as social agents (Schoenberger, 1997), and operating at different places and across different spatial scales. Moreover, the corporation is also a site where social and cultural practices are formed, transformed and transported. It is a significant component of the socio-economic landscape as individuals spend most of their time at the workplace. The economy and the corporation must be seen and treated as inter-related entities, and the processes that slide between the different spatial scales are also porous between different places. Although the concept of corporate culture continues to be frequently invoked in the literature without due regard to its specific meaning (see Kono, 1994; Carrillo and Gromb, 1999), analysts have sought to define it in a variety of ways (see Deal and Kennedy, 1982; Schoenberger, 1997; Schein, 1999; O'Donovan, 2006). The conceptualisation of corporate culture in management studies has so far focused on the 'performance' purposes of corporate culture, and the incentives it may bring to the organization. Mainstream discourse on corporate culture in management studies can be widened to include other aspects of the economy and society, that can shape and mould corporate culture. In this thesis, the workplace can be seen as a porous place which has inter-linked characteristics with the global, regional, national and local scale. In this chapter, I evaluate the notion of corporate culture and examine the approaches to understanding it. I argue for the need for a more complete framework for conceptualizing corporate culture, which includes a wider matrix of institutional forces and processes that influence corporate culture.

This chapter examines the notion of corporate culture. One of the main issues arising from this discussion is the difference in conceptualisation and understanding of corporate culture by management scholars such as Deal and Kennedy (1992), Brown

(1995), O'Donovan (2006) and economic geographers such as Schoenberger (1997), Hudson (2001), Yeung (2004) and Coe *et al* (2007). The discussion of corporate culture within the management literature mainly focuses on the efficiency and productivity of the corporation whilst the discussion in economic geography argues for a spatial dimension (place and scale) to be included in the understanding of corporate culture. In section 2.2, I examine the theoretical discussion regarding corporate culture, and how it has developed within the management literature. This discussion highlights the practice-based approach in the understanding of corporate culture. In section 2.3, I evaluate the missing links of the debate and suggest how the conceptualisation of corporate culture can be made more meaningful by bridging some of the discussion on corporate culture between different academic disciplines.

2.2   Corporate Culture: A Practice-Based Approach

In 1966, Marvin Bower[3] of McKinsey[4] provided some of the first building blocks for understanding corporate culture in the management consultancy industry, which later became the foundation for further discussion and debate in corporate culture (see Deal and Kennedy, 1982; Brown, 1995, O' Donovan, 2006; Johnson *et al*, 2008). As a business consultant and scholar, Bower established leaders' philosophies and values as the steer which guides 'how we do things around here' in successful organizations, and identified five key beliefs which are held by these companies; high ethical standards, fact-based decision-making, responsiveness to internal and external environmental forces, judging people on performance instead of personality, and a sense of competitive urgency (Drennan, 1992; O'Donovan, 2006). In the 1980s, studies emanating from American management schools on corporate culture emerged

---

[3] Managing Director of McKinsey and Company, 1950 – 1967.
[4] A pioneer management consultancy firm based in USA.

and analysts put forward divergent views on the essence and elements of this concept (see Deal and Kennedy, 1982; Brown, 1995; Thompson, 2001). These studies were often taken from business consultancy case examples based in America; and were not particularly 'critical'. In retrospect, the corporate culture discourse was very much 'practice-based', targets oriented and in tune with the business management model (optimal strategy and maximise productivity) with little emphasis on the processes and flows of the production, consumption and identity of 'culture'. In this section, I examine the notion of corporate culture, and suggest how present theoretical conceptualisations of corporate culture can be further developed. In the next part of this chapter, I then suggest a more critical and complete concept of corporate culture.

When the management literature took up the notion of culture (see Deal and Kennedy, 1982; Brown, 1995; Johnson *et al*, 2008), it concentrated on a set of areas such as business environment, company values, heroes, cultural networks, rites and rituals. Deal and Kennedy's (1982) notion of corporate culture focused primarily on the practices and management control by examining the stories and rituals within the workforce. Deal and Kennedy (1982) came to this conclusion through their empirical work and study at McKinsey & Company and Harvard's Graduate School of Education. The empirical work was conducted between the 1976 and 1982, involving numerous American financial and manufacturing companies. They interviewed hundreds of managers and collected questionnaires (a series of multiple choice questions) from employees from these companies. Their research focussed on the creation of a strong corporate culture to enhance productivity and efficiency within the companies. However, the discussion was based on achieving and sustaining competitive advantage and corporate success and remained fairly uncritical. The

business environment referred to the different levels of competition in the global marketplace, depending on the company's products, competitors, customers and technologies (Deal and Kennedy, 1982). According to this perspective, the supply and demand of the marketplace influenced the business environment, and thus contributed to the shaping of corporate culture. The more ambitious the sales strategies were, the more 'aggressive' the corporate culture was assumed to be. Company values were the official basic concepts and beliefs of an organisation which were set by the board of directors and senior executives (Deal and Kennedy, 1982; Johnson *et al*, 2008). This literature agreed that a strong culture company indicated a rich and complex system of values that were shared by all employees. Deal and Kennedy (1982) argued that a company with a strong corporate culture could gain as much as one or two hours of additional productive work per employee per day. A strong culture also enabled people to feel better about what they did and this motivated them to work harder. The workers had a firm sense of belonging and loyalty and took pride in being part of a prestigious company. This is useful in understanding the vigour behind the formation of corporate culture but the definition of what constitutes a 'strong culture' remains loose.

According to Deal and Kennedy (1982), rites and rituals could be conceived as corporate culture in action. Companies with a 'strong' culture communicate explicitly exactly how they want their people to behave. They spelled out standards of acceptable decorum, ranging from the interior design, company logo, official letterheads to the dress code and uniforms (Deal and Kennedy, 1982). The rites and rituals were the systematic and pre-determined routines of day-to-day life in the company (see also Schoenberger, 1997). Rites, rituals and ceremonies referred to the

programmed mechanisms which show or 'instructed' employees what routine behavioural practices were expected of them, according to the set of company values (Deal and Kennedy, 1982). So, the rites and rituals constituted the factors that held the company together; employee incentives, rewards, myths, ceremonies, unwritten rules of communication and interaction all come together to provide a web of meanings for the employee. In addition, Deal and Kennedy (1982) presented us with typologies of cultural figures and forms – even detailing the favourite dress, housing and sports of the various characters. Their approach set out a general idea of 'how to' diagnose, manage and change corporate culture. The cultural network was the primary means of communication within an organisation and the 'carrier' of the corporate values (Deal and Kennedy, 1982; O'Donovan, 2006). Furthermore, Alvesson (2002) suggested that a strong culture consisted of a system of informal rules that spelled out how people behaved in the corporate environment. Thus, by knowing what exactly was expected of them, by means of company values and mission statements, employees would know 'what to say or do' and 'how to say or do' and this promoted productivity and efficiency. On the other hand, in a weak culture, employees wasted time simply trying to decide what and how they should say or do.

According to Deal and Kennedy (1982), heroes were the people who personified the company and were role models for the employees to follow, and a company with strong culture has many heroes. The heroes include the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), founder(s) and director(s) who lead the company. For example, at General Electric, the heroes were Thomas Edison, the inventor; Charles Steinmetz, the engineer; Gerald Swope and Jack Welch, the Chief Executive Officers (Deal and Kennedy, 1982). The company values are set by the upper management and these

heroes of the companies - the founder(s) and/ or CEO. Corporate culture is thus shaped by the internal factors (company values, rites and rituals, heroes), external factors (business environment) and cultural networks (interaction between the workforce). Outsiders who visit or work in any of their places of business know what to expect from the visual impact and practices of the corporate culture. The rites and rituals set the tone in which people work and socialise at the workplace. A company with a strong corporate culture exercise the most visible rites and rituals on its employees, and reflecting 'the way we do things around here'. These everyday practices could be further scrutinised to enhance the exploration of corporate culture. However, these rites and rituals did not take into account what happened outside the workplace. I argue that these material practices, beliefs and values are also being shaped by the social relationships within the firm and outside, and such processes can affect the construction of corporate culture.

Deal and Kennedy's (1982) notion of corporate culture has been used in this project as the base for working towards a more holistic conceptualisation of corporate culture. The basic conception of corporate culture recognised how the workforce was affected by factors such as rites, rituals and ceremonies, company values and heroes (and villains). However, the corporate culture of the workforce was also directly influenced by explicit instructions from the practices and values determined by senior managers. Critically, there was only a single flow of influence and the workforce had no input in the shaping of corporate culture. The main issue with this conceptualisation was the lack of emphasis on a reciprocal flow between the workforce and other external factors.

In 1985, Edgar Schein of Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) put forward his own influential perspective on the notion of corporate culture (see Schein, 1985; Thompson, 2001; Alvesson, 2002). Schein asserted that people were internally driven, and identified different levels of culture which allowed deeper diagnosis and understanding of the issue (Thompson, 2001; O'Donovan, 2006). According to Schein (1985), such ritual ceremonies and artefacts were tangible components of corporate culture. These artefacts were often described as the most visible but superficial manifestations of the corporation's physical environment. He concurred with Deal and Kennedy (1982) that these rituals could be related to the physical and social environment constructed by individuals within the corporation. However, much of the emphasis in the conception of corporate culture had been on annual reports, sales, technology used, rules, procedures and programmes. The rituals and artefacts were all specifically referring to individuals' business practices in the corporate workplace (Schein, 1985). Notably, the influences outside the corporate environment and deeper insights into individual personal experiences prior to working in the corporation were not taken into consideration or not considered as significant variables in affecting corporate culture.

According to Schein (1985), the 'heroes' personified the culture's values and as such provide tangible role models for employees to follow. Some companies took a direct approach in choosing people to play these heroic roles, knowing very well that others would try to emulate their behaviour. It had been argued in various biographies of business leaders that companies which had a strong culture usually had a dominant hero, such as Rupert Murdoch of British Sky Broadcasting, and Richard Branson of Virgin Group (Fisher-Yoshida and Geller, 2009; Northouse, 2009). There were also

lesser-known but equally important internal figures, such as the inventor of the high-torque motor that powers the electric toothbrush, the site designer of a new fuel extraction plant, the export salesman who survived two overseas revolutions, the international manager who had ghosts exorcised from a factory in Singapore (see O'Donovan, 2006). These achievers (heroes) were known to virtually every employee in the company. Furthermore, they showed every employee "here's what you have to do to succeed around here". The heroes personified those values and epitomised the strength of the corporations. Heroes were pivotal figures in companies with a strong culture. The hero was thus seen as the key motivator, symphony conductor or even the 'magician', someone whom everyone could count on when things got tough. They had an unshakable character and style. They also symbolised the company to the 'outside' world, and the global market. Furthermore, these heroes were also part of the 'outside' world and a 'product' of the society.

Leaders are also seen as heroes in the firms and scholars have debated the nature of leadership in corporations for many decades (see Bass, 1990; Rost, 1991; Antonakis *et al*, 2004; Conger and Riggio, 2007). Leadership is complex and includes many dimensions. Leadership can be seen as a trait, an ability, a skill, a behaviour and a relationship. However, what is significant about leaders and heroes is how they can directly influence the workforce, and the corporate culture. In the business environment, the rites and rituals in the corporation influence the workforce, but the workforce is also shaped by the company values and the heroes (Deal and Kennedy, 1982; Schein, 1995; Grint, 2005). This is seen as a multi-layered process, and further enhanced by other factors such as the corporation's values and networks. The heroes or leaders are those who are in key positions to influence the corporate culture, and

they are often the founders or directors of the company. Heroes fulfil certain vital functions in the organisation: they 'humanise' things for the workforce, making success seem attainable to the ordinary employees, act as role models who set a high standard of performance for others to follow, encourage greater commitment to the organisation by motivating, and urging people to identify their personal achievements with the organisation's success. Thus, leaders and heroes/ villains are key features in (re)producing how 'things are done'.

In the consideration of corporate culture, the norms, values and attitudes that shaped behaviour were often 'instructed' by heroes of the firm (Alvesson, 2002; Northouse, 2009). However, the practices mainly referred to the social relations internal to the immediate colleagues, and not across or between higher management and other external experts. When business scholars and managers speak of cooperation, teamwork, empowerment, high-trust environments, respect for the individual and participation (Grint, 2005; Fisher-Yoshida and Geller, 2009), they often 'underemphasise' the external environment of the firm. Moreover, these norms and values were often linked with certain kinds of solidaristic and/or motivational strategy; cultures of pride, of creativity, of innovation and of change, internally. They may also be associated with operational commitments (often referred to as values) such as quality, responsiveness, or caring for all the stakeholders of the firm (Kotter and Heskett, 1992; Kunda, 1992; Schoenberger, 1997). Corporate culture operates through behaviours and attitudes in a corporate and business-like manner, and these processes are initialised by the heroes. When it comes to adjustment of corporate culture, the change is about adopting new values (and/ or organisational forms) and learning the new behaviours appropriate to the corporation. However, the values and

assumptions run very deep and are, in many cases, complex and tacit. They are reflected in entrenched traditions, customs and habits of practice unique to the specific corporation. In this light, culture is seen to be inherently resistant to change. As Ouchi appropriately suggests:

> "The only way to influence behaviour is to change the culture. A culture changes slowly because its values reach deeply and integrate into a consistent network of beliefs [of the corporation] that tend to maintain the status quo."

> (Ouchi, 1981, p. 75)

Schein offers a more psychological version:

> "Once we have developed an integrated set of such [common] assumptions, which might be called a thought world or mental map, we will be maximally comfortable with others who share the same set of assumptions… [but will be] very uncomfortable and vulnerable in situations where different assumptions operate."

> (Schein, 1992, p. 22)

For Schein, what is required to change a culture is a leader who can recognise when the old culture has become counterproductive, and can envision and impose a new culture. The essence of leadership, in this context, is the ability to step outside one's cultural assumptions in order to effect the change in corporate culture.

Corporate cultures were usually thought to be shaped, therefore, largely by top management, especially the firm's founders. As described by Schein (1992), the leaders' values produced what may be thought of as initial hypotheses about the way the corporate and social realm functioned. These hypotheses generated fruitful results and the values were experimentally validated, and reinforced through case studies reflected in business and management studies (see Thompson, 2001; Johnson *et al*, 2008). Over a period of time, the corporate culture was transformed into deeply held,

implicit and shared assumptions. The corporate culture then, represented and embodied the cumulative shared learning experience of the group (Schein, 1992; Kotter and Heskett, 1992). Schein, who wrote as a cognitive psychologist, puts much emphasis on cultures being integrative and interactive to produce stability and consistency within the firm. The integration and interaction may be brought to a degree where there might be cultural contradictions, and may even result in a clash between the adopted values and any underlying assumptions (Schein, 1985, 1992; Schoenberger, 1997). Schein (1985) described culture as a general phenomenon that surrounds us all and discussed how culture was created, embedded, developed, manipulated, managed, and changed in the corporation. Most importantly, he stressed that culture defined leadership in the corporation. In other words, the leadership of the corporation was denoted by the general culture of the company. I find this useful when reflecting upon the autobiographies of successful (and not so successful) leaders of large companies.

However, a corporation is not just made up of leaders (heroes and villains) and top management. Hence, corporate culture should not just examine the top ranks of the pyramid, but should also include individuals in the middle, and lower ranks across different departments. In my research, I maintain that corporate culture can also be influenced by such individuals. Furthermore, language, customs and traditions can reflect the group's norms, standards, values, as they are 'published' or announced values. However, implicit 'rules of the game' cannot be so easily deciphered. So, behaviour patterns and rituals imply structural stability and it is also more complex than just defining leadership in the corporation. Leadership is only part of the formation of corporate culture, and is integrated in the functioning of the corporation.

34

Furthermore, Deal and Kennedy's (1982) model on corporate culture did not address how leaders and heroes were influenced by factors and embedded practices outside the corporation, which can affect the shaping of corporate culture. In this thesis, I also show how the complexity of these heroes (and other individuals) can be shaped by their individual development and experiences (such as education and national service), and how these characteristic are crucial in the (in)direct formation of corporate culture at the workplace.

Business scholars write extensively on the larger problems of the firm, addressing survival and growth, especially during financial crisis and recovery periods (Anderson, 1993; Warner, 1993; Bennett, 1999; Griffith et al, 2008). In an ideal world, heroes and workers work together in times of internal or external crisis. However, the key intent of the top management is to strategise the company performance, whilst individual workers are more interested in the targets they have to reach on a regular basis. Moreover, everyday rituals in the corporation mainly concern the 'shopfloor' workers, sales, marketing and finance teams. So, corporate culture is not just something explicit that can be managed by the leaders to obtain optimal productivity. In relation to sustaining this optimal productivity, Schein (1985) suggested new members should be taught and initiated into the company. Individuals, especially leaders, should be aware of the culture or they would be 'managed' by the corporation. However, this is rather ambivalent and lacking in giving significance to the individuals bringing their experiences with them, and interacting with the company (Schoenberger, 1997). It should not be a single flow of interaction. The 'management' emphasis on corporate culture cannot be as simplistic as reducing it to management of the mission, strategies and goals. I argue that the nature of the

problem lies with the approach to understanding corporate culture in this situation. In this thesis, I argue that the conceptualisation of corporate culture should be more inclusive of the individuals and conventions that affect them. Using collected data, I demonstrate how individuals' own immediate background (see chapter 7) and experience (rather than just those of the top management) can affect the corporate culture at the workplace. The leaders might start with the values and beliefs but it is the workers who maintain those values and beliefs. And over time, as the corporate culture changes, the change can be successful only if the workers themselves are intrinsically part of the change. In the following, the everyday practices and routines at the corporation are examined to illustrate further how factors outside the corporation should be included in the conceptualisation of corporate culture.

The literature suggest that heroes of corporate culture are attentive to the orchestration of all rituals of work life (Deal and Kennedy, 1982; Brown, 1995; Alvesson, 2002), from recruitment to rewards and meeting formats, to writing styles, modes of speech, and even to the way to conduct a retirement dinner. They know how significant these rituals are as they give the corporate culture a tangible and cohesive form (Thrift, 2000; O'Donovan, 2006). In a company with a strong culture, nothing can be too trivial. A strong culture suggests that all the employees are well 'instructed' on what to do and how to portray the image of the company through their business practices. Any event that occurs in a work context is an event to be managed, and used to strengthen the corporate culture. This could be through the style of sales pitches, breakfast meetings and Friday departmental lunches. Social ritual (often known as play), was the creative side of corporate life (Pheysey, 1993; Thrift, 2000). It was designed to release tension and encourages innovation and interaction. Despite having

no explicit aims and rules, these social rituals were meant to create and strengthen teamwork (Beyer and Trice, 1988; Thompson, 2001). They are supposed to reduce conflict whilst creating new visions and cultural values. More formal and organised rituals would be in the form of workshops, retreats or strategy planning sessions. The unwritten rules of personal communication occupied a considerable amount of company time (Brown, 1995). They also gave some guidance to where the employees stand, reinforce an individual's identity within the company, and set the tone for the way in which people related to one another (O'Donovan, 2006). The literature shows that work rituals are valuable because they provided a sense of security and common identity, and assigned meaning to mundane activities.

According to Alvesson (2002), rituals such as training programmes, induction programmes and retirement dinners facilitate changes and transition in social roles and status. They are also a symbolic mark for the individual joining or leaving the corporation. Practices such as engaging external consultants, commissioning of reports, circulation of stories and news are used to challenge the established existing order of the organisation (O'Donovan, 2006). This is useful in helping the corporation re-position itself in the market before deciding on which direction it wanted to head towards. Office parties, job redesign programmes, re-organisation schemes and employee opinion surveys help rejuvenate the corporation. Used in various combinations,

> "[these] relatively elaborate, dramatic, planned sets of activities that consolidate various forms of cultural expression into organised events... are carried out through social interaction, usually for the benefit of an audience"

> (Beyer and Trice, 1988, p. 142)

These rituals are not only important for the messages they communicate to individuals who participated in the culture, but also for the influence they exercised over them (Brown, 1995). These rituals gave individuals a sense of belonging, as they felt that they were part of the construction and maintenance of the culture in the corporation. Furthermore, each ritual told a story and symbolized a belief central to the culture. It was a dramatisation of the company's cultural values. Hence, the recurrent patterns of behaviour and connections became a feature of corporate organisation life (Alvesson, 1992; Brown, 1995). Without this connection, rituals become just habits and do nothing but give people a false sense of security and certainty. Rituals provided the place and script for the employees. According to Alvesson (1992), the ceremonies were cultural extravaganza and/ or simple events when employees and the company achieve particular milestones. These ceremonies help the company celebrate heroes, stories (myths) and symbols (see also discussion in chapters 5, 6 and 7). Such ceremonies maintained and reinforced the values, beliefs and heroes in employees' minds and hearts. They also reinforced successes and failures in the company. This was used as a tactic by senior management for the essential survival of the company in a competitive market.

The discussion so far has indicated an 'insular' and 'inward' approach to conceptualising corporate culture within the firm. However, the workplace is a separate place from the nation-state, and differences between places have acquired significance as processes of time-space compression (Harvey, 1989). Places are complex entities: they are a collection of material objects, works and firms, and systems of social relations embodying distinct cultures and multiple meanings (Hudson, 2001). The inter-connections between the workplace and characteristics

from the wider environment can be more explicitly integrated in the conceptualising of corporate culture. Schoenberger (1997) offered another perspective on corporate culture and has included social position, managerial identity and situated knowledge in the understanding of corporate culture. In the following diagram (figure 1), Schoenberger (1997) illustrates how the various categories of corporate culture, identity and strategy are mapped out. Corporate strategy indicates the direction and scope of the organisation's long term future and the general concept encompasses categories such as statistical forecasting, risk analysis, investment appraisal, acquisition and divestment (Schoenberger, 1997; Bennett, 1999; Johnson *et al*, 2008). Corporate strategies are often viewed as a product of the decision making process of top management. In figure 1, it sketches the relationships among the various groups of culture, identity and strategy and "they should be seen as mutually constitutive process rather than circular and endlessly self-reproducing states" (Schoenberger, 1997, p. 153). Here, the proposition is that managerial identities and commitments are closely intertwined with corporate identities and commitments. Consequently, the actions and interpretations of the management are reflected in the corporate outlook of the corporation.

Corporate culture   Corporate Strategy

Corporate identity

Managerial Identity

Power/ social position   ⟷   Situated knowledge
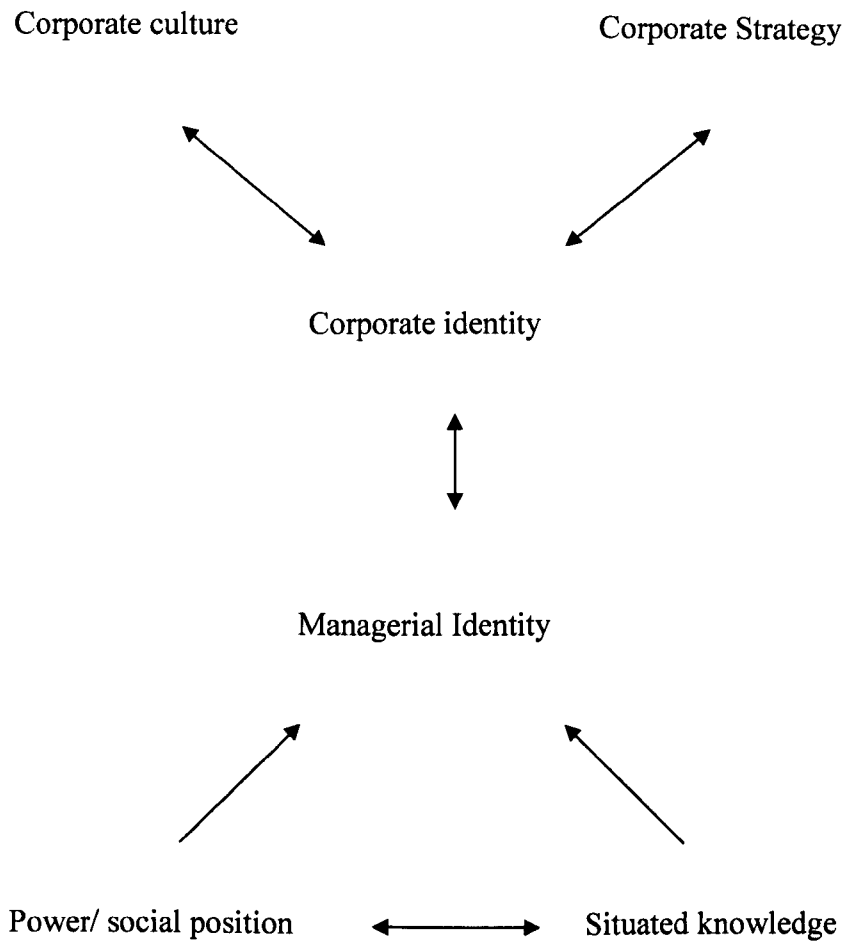
Figure 1: Identity, culture and strategy (Schoenberger, 1997, p. 153)

Figure 1 is useful for considering how managerial identities and corporate identities can inter-relate. The influence is reciprocal in the identity formation of the individuals (managers) and groups (firms). The new competitors, alternative culture and social factors would also emerge to challenge the dominant culture. Schoenberger's case studies of the fragility and short-sightedness of large American companies, such as Xerox and Lockheed, exemplified the significance of corporate culture in the environment of international and interregional institutions. Her work on the competitive strategies of multinational corporations and the study of Lockheed

brought further connections with high-level executives of more than sixty major industrial enterprises. Schoenberger's (1997) approach resonated with some significant studies of national business systems and varieties of capitalism (see Berger and Dore, 1996; Boyer and Hollingsworth, 1999; Soskice, 1999; Whitley, 1999), which I discuss further in a later section of this chapter, and on corporate practices (O'Sullivan, 2000; Yeung, 2000). Both conceptual argument and empirical evidence demonstrated that strategies and business practices of large firms could be influenced by national frameworks. However, she cautioned her readers not to be convinced that the specific interpretations offered were unique and "true" explanations, but rather another way of thinking that could significantly help in understanding a very complicated puzzle. In this thesis, I apply Schoenberger's (1997) approach and go further to include the political, social and cultural processes of the research site.

The analysis process of Schoenberger's (1997) work relied heavily on recollections of people involved in Lockheed and these were sometimes selective and partial. Lockheed was a large and well-established firm. It was founded in 1913 producing civilian aircrafts. In 1938, it moved from making civilian aircraft to producing bombers for the defence market. During the Second World War, Lockheed accounted for 9 percent of US military aircraft production (Lockheed Horizons, 1983; Francillon, 1982; Business Week, 1951; cited Schoenberger, 1997). The constant juggling between producing civilian and military aircraft took a toll on Lockheed as it was not able to stay competitive. In the civilian aircraft market, it was constantly outplayed by Douglas and Boeing. The decision was then to move its production strategy from the civilian aircraft industry to military aircraft (missiles and space) industry. The shift was technically challenging but Lockheed already had a long tradition and familiarity

in the defence market. However, the management of Lockheed was resistant to the change and when the firm finally committed itself to a significant project, chaos occurred not only in the technical department but also organisational aspect of the firm. The main problem was in fact

> "the firm's culture and identity and that conflict resolved around divergent conceptions of who and what the firm was and ought to be, what it ought to do, and how it ought to do it."

> (Schoenberger, 1997, p. 157)

Particularly pressing problems were guidance and control. The lack of a strong corporate culture and identity meant that issues of labour recruitment and management were disorganised. The corporate culture was embodied in the people who ran Lockheed. These people were almost exclusively aeronautical engineers who spent most of their careers designing and producing aircraft. Redefining Lockheed's mission, values and commitments did not come naturally to these people. The shift from an engineering to a more scientific research and development culture raised tensions and conflicts between the engineers and scientists.

Schoenberger's (1997) case studies illustrated the internal conflict of the corporation over how the firm should be operating in an evolving outside world. Within the xerographic industry, the market was impregnable as the technology was protected by a thick layer of patents. In 1959, the employment of Xerox was 600. By 1966, employment reached 24, 000 (Kearns and Nadler, 1992). The company moved from small-scale production to large-scale production without a sufficient system of tracking costs, billings and revenues. Consequently, the accounting books became complicated (Kearns and Nadler, 1992). Top management felt they were losing

control and implemented a new style of management in the financial as well as the operational departments to cope with the external demand (Schoenberger, 1997). The new recruitment drive saw the introduction of specialists very eloquent in the management of mass production industries. One of them was Archie McCardell, from Ford, who later became a Xerox president. According to Schoenberger (1997), the problems began when the Xerox people did not share the same values as the auto people. The intention of bringing in the Ford team to change the culture of Xerox backfired, and resulted in more difficulties in the long run. This demonstrated the struggles of the firms coming to terms with their culture and identity in the corporate and global world. It reflected features and processes such as 'categories of material practices, social relations, and ways of thinking' (Schoenberger, 1997, p. 155). This further indicates that inter-organisational and intra-organisational relations between the components of corporate culture should also be taken into consideration – the values of the members in the organisation, the ways of life or practices of the members of the society and their 'norms' affecting the way they shape corporate culture can be more explicitly included in the conception of corporate culture. Corporations can thus be seen as a site for cultural processes as much as economic processes. I find this analysis very useful as culture and the economy are very closely inter-linked and inter-twined (see also Borjas, 1996; Berger and Huntington, 2002; Hamilton, 2004). Dynamics of power, resistance, identities, social positioning and processes of valuation all melt together to shape corporate strategies to enable selective change (Schoenberger, 1997). It is not just about improving the profits for the firms but also improving the factors of production in the economy.

The Xerox and Lockheed examples exemplified the importance of national and corporate frameworks. The dynamics were inherently fraught with tensions and contradictions; the actual historical outcomes are highly indeterminate, and this indeterminacy had several important consequences for the discussion (Schoenberger, 1997). The problem was made all the more difficult by the peculiarities of corporations as social agents. The corporation was both a collection of individuals and a self-reproducing institution whose identity was linked with, but not the same as, those of the people who work in it. Specific individuals may enter as an employee and choose to leave, but the corporation remains. As these individuals enter into the life of the corporation, they were shaped by its culture, but they also produced its culture through their activities and their relations (see Martin, 1992; Schoenberger, 1997). Cultures were seen as coherent and unifying systems that were necessary for the stability and smooth functioning of the corporation. These systems created shared understandings concerning appropriate behaviours, attitudes, and ways of thinking. The indeterminacy meant that we could look at how these processes and dynamics work themselves out historically and in different geographical, social and political circumstances in order to understand why the production system looked and behaved the way it did. Furthermore, this indeterminacy meant that time and space could be planned. In other words, corporations could strive to achieve competitive advantages through the management of temporal and spatial dynamics. These become interesting issues when we connect the meaning and the experience of cultural production within the firm. Hence, this thesis seeks to explore corporate culture in a different geographical, social, political situation, and demonstrate how these circumstances can have a significant impact on corporate culture (see discussion in chapters 6, 7 and 8).

The discussion so far has covered the basic foundations of corporate culture. The focus on the superficial appearances, internal rituals, 'instructions' on how to behave and operate leads to the kind of corporate culture that is favoured by management. What is intrinsically missing in the current debate on corporate culture is the input of the individuals and their experiences from working in other firms. The notion of ongoing networks of relationships such as intra-firm networks, inter-firm networks and extra-firm networks must also be taken into consideration when examining business organisations (see Yeung, 1994, 1998). The material practices, social relationships and political economy must also be included in the conceptualising of corporate culture. The approach of how corporate culture works at different types of places and at different scales can also be applied to the understanding of corporate culture. According to Hudson (2001),

> "Space can be thought of as a product of stretched-out social relationships, place as the condensation of intersecting social relationships in a specific time-space context. Places may be thought of as closed, homogenous, and bounded or as open, heterogeneous, and permeable."

(Hudson, 2001, p. 282)

The complexities of how social relationships can intersect should be incorporated into the conceptualisation of corporate culture to include the wider factors (outside the firm) that can shape corporate culture. This thesis examines such missing links and offers another perspective on how corporate culture can be better understood and examined.

2.3   Corporate Culture: Missing Links

According to Gertler (2003), the current debate on corporate culture remains superficial, and a wider matrix of institutional forces and processes that influence

corporate culture are not taken into consideration. In this section, I discuss and offer

an alternative perspective on corporate culture; incorporating institutional structures,

societal characteristics and national business systems to the current framework for

understanding corporate culture.

In economics, the simplest model illustrating how an economy works was the circular

flow model which involved the household and the firm (see Borjas, 1996; Katz and

Rosen, 2005), and the firm was often viewed simply as a set of production units; a

'black box' that converted inputs into outputs according to market demands (see Lee

and Wills, 1997; Coe *et al*, 2007). This was a situation of *ceteris paribus*, assuming all

things remained equal. In the *real* world, the flows and interactions are far more

vibrant and complex than the circular flow model suggests and involves corporate

identity and managerial identity (see Bennett, 1999; Thompson, 2001; Johnson *et al*,

2008). Hence, this is a very simplistic 'black box' perception of the economy.

According to the economist's view of the economy, firms had to provide quality (and

value-for-money) services and goods to households (Katz and Rosen, 2005) and

households provide the labour to firms, *ceteris paribus*. However, in the *real* world,

the professional interactions between firms and households are also a social process.

The boundaries between work and home, 'us' and 'them', are constantly contested.

Corporations can thus be seen as a site for cultural processes as much as economic

processes. Moreover, according to economists, the so-called common market is seen

as a site for developing new ways of organising and managing firms and labour of the

economy (see Bosworth *et al*, 1996; Katz and Rosen, 2005). Furthermore,

corporations make up a major part of the economy and are run by people who are both

in the firms and society (Schoenberger, 1997), and the boundaries between the

individuals and corporate are sometimes blurred. Hence, corporate culture needs to embrace the complex relationships between aspects of the business, cultural, social and political environment. In this section, I suggest corporate culture can be more interlinked with other external factors of the corporate environment. Although it is implicitly shaped by managerial identity, which is influenced by the social position and knowledge of individuals who manage the corporation, this suggests that managerial identity is more directly linked to the corporate culture and 'how things are done here'. I also suggest that on the micro-scale, issues relating to the individuals may have a more direct link to the formation of corporate culture. On the macro-scale, institutions and organisational structures may affect how an individual functions in the society and company. In this thesis, I explore a broader representation of how social, cultural and political characteristics can affect the rites, rituals and ceremonies, affecting the shaping of corporate culture.

Faulconbridge (2006, 2008b) has suggested that business practices are not only rooted at the local scale but have different spatial spans. According to Faulconbridge (2008b), strategies of firms for managing institutional difference are influenced by workers and managers who respond to the demands of industry, and have firm-specific ways to the implementation of home-country practices. This reinforced how corporate culture may not be just an internal product of the company but also a by-product of forces outside the corporation – at regional and national scale. According to Whiley (1999), the business system approach takes into consideration geographical contexts at the national scale. This approach argued that there are distinctive ways of doing business and over time, such business practices become institutionalised as ways of organising economic activities in the national economy (Whitley, 1999).

Moreover, the challenges faced by corporations when managing across diverse institutional systems had taken centre stage in the varieties of capitalism literature (see Hall and Soskice, 2001; Witt and Redding, 2010). Thus, the varieties of capitalism approaches, such as that of Hall and Soskice (2001), usually assume that all part of a national system are complementary and can be captured as holistic models using such terms as 'Anglo-American' or 'Germanic'. This resulted in a rise of studies of the management of institutional differences that focused on the macroscale (system level), rather than on the microscale (practice level). However, variations in institutional norms and behaviours have often been underemphasised in such studies (Crouch, 2005). As Crouch (2005) noted, workers and managers are active players who determine the outcome of interactions between practices of larger corporations based in different countries. Witt and Redding (2010) suggest that institutional variations across nations are related to differences in underlying patterns. They illustrated salient differences in the ways in which German and Japanese executives think about the ideal shape of the economy and the findings are consistent with the notion that institutional variations across nations reflect nationally contingent conceptions of ends and means held by business leaders and other economic actors. In this thesis, I examine how such institutional features and embeddedness can contribute to the way in which workers and managers carry out their daily practices at work, whilst still taking into consideration the characteristics of the national business system.

Hall and Appleyard (2009) argue that highly-skilled financiers and individuals contribute significantly to business practices through their own business network and education. The educational background and ongoing education of the individuals continues to change the way they 'do things' at the workplace. These working

practices have been identified as 'global pipelines' for the circulation of financial knowledge and expertise within transnational financial firms (Beaverstock, 2005). These studies of transnational elites and highly-skilled financiers in London reflect just how such individuals can act as central actors in (re)producing the 'way things are done here'. This can be further applied to national and transnational corporations, where the workers come from a diverse background (previous work experience, ethnicity and educational background), and how they are vital in shaping corporate culture. Furthermore, the inseparability of the economic and the social, cultural, and political has long been debated, drawing on the concept of embeddedness (see Granovetter, 1985; Peck, 2005). The role of global business practices as social practices could also influence the workforce (see Bartlett and Ghosal, 1998; Bunnell and Coe, 2001; Amin and Cohendet, 2004). Hence, the 'embedded' characteristics and ongoing developmental experiences of the individuals must be considered more critically in the evaluation of corporate culture. According to Hudson (2001), 'firms, governments and other organisations have a collective memory beyond that of any individual or group of individuals' (2001, p. 32). Implicit in ways of thinking and material practices are the relationships that exist within a firm, partners and its employees. The 'collective memory' of such social relationships forms a social 'glue' that holds the corporation together and facilitates a complex collection of labour to work 'efficiently' and 'productively'. The different activities of the firm and societal practices thus help create this 'collective memory'. Thus, the societal characteristics and practices can further inform the process of shaping of corporate culture. The different cultures of relationships within the firm and society further cement this social 'glue'. Aspects such as societal values and cultural values shared by the employees of the firm should be included as conventions that perpetuate over time, and become the

'norms' of 'way we do things here'. This thesis offers a perspective on how such cultural characteristics, such as Confucianism (see Hsing, 1996; Yeung and Olds, 2000), can affect the rites, rituals and ceremonies that help shape the corporate culture. In this thesis, I explore how socially embedded relations can be taken into consideration to enable a more meaningful consideration of corporate culture. The discussion of corporate culture so far has reflected the need for a more complete framework to capture the reality of how corporate culture can, and must incorporate wider economic, social, and political context. What happens to firms affects a large number of people and bears heavily on the economic viability of different communities, cities and regions (see Hall and Soskice, 2001; Wild *et al*, 2010). In this thesis, I look at a collective group of companies in Singapore, and demonstrate how a more complex understanding of corporate culture reflects wider economic, social and political processes of Singapore.

The firm is a place of cultural production and in many ways, also a site for mass production of culture. The corporation is made up of individuals, and is a self-producing institution whose identity is also linked with the people who work in it (Schoenberger, 1997). I strongly agree with Schoenberger's suggestion that individuals enter the corporation, absorbing and interacting with the culture within the corporation via its activities. However, individuals also bring along their own experiences and practices, especially their education, social and economic background. In addition, Glasmeier (2001) emphasized the role of collective identity and belonging in culture; singling out 'shared understandings... the prevailing belief system' as well as 'the rules and practices, identities and aspirations at the most intimate level' which make possible 'collective purposeful action' (Glasmeier, 2001,

p. 58). However, there are also difficulties in the integration of their own individual (or collective) experiences in the workplace. In the corporate life, individuals are obliged to 'obey' the rules of engagement and may not be capable of changing corporate rules. Those who are in the position to change or shape such rules are the managers who deal with the upper management and the team members. However, I argue that the boundaries between how 'we should do things here' and how 'things are done here' may not be very clear in practical terms. These individuals bring in their own experiences, and process them at the workplace to add on to the 'prescribed' corporate culture. Thus, the corporate arena becomes a site for individuals to process their personal and cultural experiences.

According to Schoenberger (1997), language is often used to describe the practices of the corporate employee, and such rituals can be shared and deployed to shape corporate practices. This is supposedly a new style of managing, or a softer version of engineering people and culture in the corporate arena. However, it is solidly rooted in the idea of organizations and corporations as meaning systems and, in this respect at least, it again opens up questions about the place of terms like myth, ritual and language within the organization. I argue that these rituals and ceremonies are often very inward-looking and are mainly concerned with the happenings within the company. The discussion in this section highlighted grounds for a more complete understanding of the factors affecting the rituals and ceremonies. Following the discussion in this section, there is a need to be more inclusive of the geo-political landscapes, nation-building, language, cultural beliefs, political economy and education which can significantly affect the way in which these rituals and ceremonies can be shaped and eventually influence corporate culture at the workplace. Deal and

Kennedy's (1982) and Schoenberger's (1997) conceptions of corporate culture are useful in providing a strong foundation in the exploration of corporate culture. Furthermore, one of the main objectives of this thesis is to examine critically how corporate culture can be made more complete by including some of the links (such as nation building process, economic system, political economy and cultural values) in the shaping of corporate culture.

In this thesis, I rework Deal and Kennedy's (1982) concept of corporate culture and demonstrate how complex and contested processes between firms, individuals and groups can affect the way in which corporate culture is shaped. The experience of individuals who have worked in different firms and brought their experiences into the present firm must be given more emphasis to enrich the discussion of the construction of corporate culture. The individuals gain different experiences from the various firms they work in and the people they meet and socialise with (see Schoenberger, 1997; Beaverstock, 2005). In addition, these firms have different local and overseas contacts, and corporate practices (Faulconbridge, 2008b). I show how the heroes in all the different companies display traits and characteristics of the society, and continue to influence the corporate culture at the workplace. Furthermore, practices and influences outside the corporate environment are equally important, and this thesis explores how such practices and influences can significantly affect corporate culture. I illustrate how corporate culture is inherently and deeply implicated in what individuals and groups do under certain social and political circumstances. These processes embrace and continue to change material practices, social relations and ways of thinking. Hence, the conceptualisation of corporate culture can incorporate, to

a greater extent, political, social and cultural processes to reflect more accurately 'how things are done' at the workplace.

I build on Schoenberger's (1997) conception of corporate culture being a set of social conventions embracing behavioural norms, standards, customs, and the 'rules of the game' underlying social interactions within the firm. According to Schoenberger (1997), corporate culture is about how 'things are done here', and the conventions are interlinked with a set of values and ideologies that provide a more general direction in shaping behavioural patterns in the corporate workplace. Corporate culture is also identified as shared meanings and assumptions, which were often expressed through symbols, rituals, myths, and ceremonies (see Ouchi, 1981; Deal and Kennedy, 1982; Schein, 1992; Kotter and Heskett, 1992; Trice and Beyer, 1993). These are helpful fundamentals for understanding the notion of corporate culture and the model coined by Deal and Kennedy (1982) has been widely used by other scholars such as Schein (1985), Brown (1995), Schoenberger (1997) and O'Donovan (2006) in the discussion on corporate culture. However, in this thesis, I argue that there are deeper and more complex connections between corporate culture and wider societal factors that need to be further explored. There should be more focus on other factors that influence the corporate workers, and shaping corporate culture. Emphasis on language can be included, such as metaphors, stories and jargon used inside and outside the corporate environment. Social activities (company social events or sessions) and even the physical landscape of the office space (for example the appearance of the office entrance, carparks, pantry and location of departments) can also be more explicitly included to enrich the discussion (see Crang, 1994; Nonaka and Konno, 1998). In essence, attempts to diagnose the corporate culture need to delve deeper into the

interactions between the physical, social and political landscapes to avoid a 'black box' approach of corporate culture. In figure 2, I offer an alternative conception of corporate culture to include the links in the present literature on corporate culture.

Figure 2: Corporate Culture (author's own)

RITES, RITUALS AND CEREMONIES
- Heroes & Villains
- Corporate Identity
- Company Values

CHINESE CAPITALISM
- Confucianism
- *Guanxi*
- *Mianzi*
- Business Networks

CORPORATE CULTURE

- National Service
- Nation Building
- Role of the State

POLITICAL ECONOMY

- Asian Values
- Education & Class
- Language

SOCIETAL CHARACTERISTICS

Figure 2 suggests that corporate culture has a more central position in the function of the company, as the corporation is made up of individuals who belong to both the firm and household. The 'way things are done' in the workplace is thus significantly affected by the wider surroundings of the corporation and national business environment; political economy, societal characteristics, Chinese capitalism, rites, rituals and ceremonies. National business environment is composed of unique cultural, political, legal, and economic characteristics that define business activity within the nation's borders (Wild *et al*, 2010). However, the set of national characteristics can differ vastly from country to country (see also Coe *et al*, 2007). As nations open up and engage with the globalisation process, their business environments are being transformed. The drivers of globalisation (technological innovation and falling trade and investment barriers) influence every aspect of the international business environment (Griffin and Pustay, 2010). The dynamic nature of globalisation generates opportunities (and competition) for all firms, and managers rush to consolidate, and create strategic positioning in the global market. As a result, this can cause powerful synergies and enormous tensions to arise within and across various elements of a society. Hence, company managers must be attentive to such nuances, adapting their products and practices accordingly. In the global market, managers must now be more sensitive to different national culture, and be attentive to how nation states can intervene in business to preserve national culture, such as film making and broadcasting (Wild *et al*, 2010). The different components of culture can range from aesthetics, values, attitudes, folk customs, gift-giving, social structure, religion, education and language. The political economy of the society must be taken into account, especially where the government plays a pivotal role in economic progress. The processes of nation building and national service should be considered

as they have direct influence on the everyday lives and social relations of the workers. This describes a more interactive link between the individual and corporate culture. And to make it even more complete, I argue that wider societal characteristics such as cultural values, language, education and class should also be included in the consideration of corporate culture.

The discussion has reflected that studies of corporate culture, especially from a management perspective, do not take into account the broader socio-economic and institutional environment. Arguably, there are two important approaches in the literature. The first approach, derived from Varieties of Capitalism literature (see Hall and Soskice, 2001; Crouch, 2005), emphasises institutional forms and path dependence. The second approach has a more cultural and psychological dimension (see Hofstede, 1980; Tang and Koveos, 2008). Hofstede's (1980, 2001) five cultural dimensions – power distance, individualism, uncertainty avoidance, goal orientation, and long-term orientation – have a great impact on understanding cultural dimensions (see Tang and Koveos, 2008; Kirkman *et al*, 2006). The individualism dimension identifies the extent to which a culture emphasizes the individual versus the group (Wild *et al*, 2010). Although people are given freedom to focus on personal goals, they are held responsible for their actions. On the contrary, people in collectivist cultures tend to work toward collective rather than personal goals and are responsible to the groups and actions. The power distance dimension conveys the degree to which a culture accepts social inequality among its people (Wild *et al*, 2010). A culture with large power distance tends to be characterized by much inequality between superiors and subordinates. In the case of Singapore, Hofstede's cultural dimensions were applied and it was found that the power distance index is higher than the world

average power distance index and other Asian countries' power index, indicating a highly structured and hierarchical society (see www.hofstede.com). The uncertainty avoidance dimension identifies the extent to which a culture avoids uncertainty and ambiguity (Wild *et al*, 2010). A culture with large uncertainty avoidance values security and places its faith in strong systems of rules and procedures in society. Singapore's uncertainty avoidance index is significantly lower than the world average and other Asian countries' uncertainty avoidance index (www.hofstede.com). This indicates that the society is more tolerant of opinions different from what they are used to, and are not expected to express emotions. The goal orientation dimension captures the extent to which a culture emphasizes personal achievement and materialism versus relationship and quality of life (Wild *et al*, 2010). Cultures scoring high on this index tend to be characterized more by personal assertiveness and accumulation of wealth, typically translating into an entrepreneurial drive. Singapore's goal orientation index is aligned to the world's index, indicating an emphasis of work-life balance equilibrium society (www.hofstede.com). The long-term orientation dimension indicates a society's time perspective and an attitude of overcoming obstacles with time, if not with will and strength (Wild *et al*, 2010). A high-scoring culture (strong long-term orientation) values respect for tradition, thrift, perseverance, and a sense of personal shame. A low-scoring culture is characterized by individual stability and reputation, fulfilling social obligations, and reciprocation of greetings and gifts. Singapore's long-term orientation index is similar to the rest of the world, but is significantly lower than other Asian countries (www.hofstede.com). As for the individualism index, Singapore's score is lower than the world average index, and indicates a strong collectivism index. This suggests that everyone is expected to look after him/herself and his/her immediate family, but is also integrated into strong,

cohesive groups, and extended families, in exchange for unquestioning loyalty (www.hofstede.com).

According to Kirkman *et al* (2006), Hofstede's framework stands out in cross-cultural research because of its 'clarity, parsimony, and resonance with managers' (ibid, p. 286). However, despite the framework's popularity, several studies have questioned the applicability of Hofstede's cultural scores (see McSweeney, 2002; Schwartz, 1994; Shenkar, 2001; Smith, 2002). One major criticism is that the indices fail to capture anecdotal data which provide significant evidence regarding the dynamics of cultures in an increasingly integrated world (Tang and Koveos, 2008). Furthermore, Hofstede's study involves only one organization (IBM), one industry and did not recognise transnational business cultures or intra-state ethnicities. Hofstede conducted a consulting project for IBM and later reinterpreted his findings in terms of how IBM employees in different countries responded to the survey questions. According to Tung and Verbeke (2010), the scholarly fields of International Business and management in general are now populated with a number of 'clubs', each of which has very specific views on the inclusion of Hofstede's cultural dimensions and measurable proxies. Nevertheless, it is not the intention of this thesis to investigate or apply the quantitative approach of Hofstede's cultural dimensions, but to provide that missing anecdotal and qualitative dimension to corporate culture.

In addition, this thesis looks at a specific kind of economic system – Chinese capitalism. Characteristics of Chinese capitalism are explored to reflect how it can affect corporate culture. As for the existence of potentially conflicting subcultures within the firm, only rarely are dissent and fragmentation brought to the fore as an

inherent aspect of cultural processes. This reflects the connections between corporate culture, social and cultural processes. The managerial identity is shaped by influences outside the corporation and is also shaped the corporate identity and culture. Thus, to conceptualize corporate culture, factors that influence the individuals must be taken into consideration to enable a more complete representation of the corporate culture. Furthermore, there should be more explicit connections between the corporation, the socio-economical and geo-political landscapes. In this thesis, the search for a more holistic framework of understanding corporate culture has led to an examination of three companies of different ownerships in Singapore. The social and power relations between the individuals and wider society demonstrate the significant impact on material practices of everyday lives in the business environment. The following chapters on Chinese capitalism and the political economy of Singapore set the scene on how the economic and political circumstances in Singapore can affect corporate culture.

2.4   Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explored the notion of corporate culture. It is not only important to understand the concept for the purpose of managing it for optimal productivity, but also to understand the process of its construction. Corporate culture is not just a 'myth' created by management. A closer look at the discussion on the meaning and origins of corporate culture reveals it to be as much a product of its social-cultural-institutional environment as it is a reflection of the firm's own preferred path of development, or agenda of its senior managers. In other words, while corporate culture can be created within from the corporate and company's structure, it may also be shaped, influenced and constrained by the wider and broader environment. The

debate on corporate culture has confirmed the importance of company values, heroes, rites and rituals (Deal and Kennedy, 1982; Schein, 1985; Brown, 1995; Alvesson, 2002). However, more importantly, the social and cultural practices of the region where the company is situated should be included as part of the framework for conceptualising corporate culture. Corporate culture may not necessarily be a set of universal or traditional values and must take into account the role of the corporation and embedded economic practices (Granovetter, 1985), and how they exist within and across different scales in the contemporary global space economy.

In the discussion of my empirical material, the often taken-for-granted socio-cultural practices of the firms are further elaborated to illustrate the kind of corporate culture that is dominant in Singapore. I contest the notion that corporate culture is primarily a one-way process, and that the role of the workforce has to adapt themselves to management controls. With corporate cultures, we are dealing with the diagnosis and management of human beings. This is not to say that the more intangible vehicles of culture have no place; things such as attitudes and stereotypes (pre-judged impressions of others) are also significant in affecting routines and practices. But when our understanding of the phenomenon is largely limited to mechanisms external to the individuals who make up the corporate communities, we can neither manage nor change corporate culture in any meaningful way. The discussion in management studies has been mainly targeted at the corporate audience, whilst the debate within economic and cultural geography has been largely a theoretical exercise. This thesis intends to bridge the gap between the disciplines. Discussion in this chapter has explored some of the missing links in the conceptualisation of corporate culture, and they can be bridged by including issues such as the national business environment,

political economy, education, language, economic system and nation building process, as factors (outside the corporate environment) which can influence the formation of corporate culture.

In this research, I identify influences that affect the various levels of management, and reflect the connections with the local societal culture and practices. This includes how education, class and gender affect the shaping of corporate culture. I also look into the work experiences of the individuals in different sectors and companies for a fuller representation of corporate culture in Singapore. Furthermore, I examine the extent to which these different experiences may influence the corporate culture of the organisation they are situated in at present. Consequently, the workplace becomes a site for individuals to process their personal and cultural experiences (Scheonberger, 1997). The processes of social differentiation are complex; the greater complexity of external linkages and internal socioeconomic structure and spatial patterning is also connected to more complicated characterization and senses of places (Hudson, 2001). Complex corporate environments are seen as composed mosaics of social worlds in the same place. Places are thus seen to be marked by more complex divisions, as alternative social worlds coexist within larger social worlds. On one hand, these individuals act as social agents, and have any impact on the rest of society. On the other hand, these individuals, are also corporate agents, and can influence corporate culture. Corporate culture operates through learned behaviours and attitudes. Cultural change is also about adopting new values (and/or organizational forms) and learning the new behaviours appropriate and applicable to them. However, the values and assumptions are rooted and are, in many cases, deep and tacit. They are reflected in entrenched traditions, customs and habits of practice and of thought. While this is a

useful perspective, I argue that these traditions and customs may not necessarily restrict innovation, and is capable of providing a level of creativity. I argue that besides taking into account the rites, rituals, ceremonies, symbols and artefacts of the everyday life in the corporate arena, research must also take into consideration other socio-economic factors such as geo-political situation, nation-building process and the variety of capitalism it is situated in, which are underemphasised in the present literature on corporate culture. Based on both conceptual argument and empirical evidence, I demonstrate from a qualitative point of view how corporate cultures are shaped by (and embedded within) the various national institutional frameworks in which they operate in. Corporate culture is not just about the 'way things are done here'; it has to incorporate a wider framework of where the firm is situated. The geographical region matters in the make-up of the factors contributing to the construction of corporate culture. Furthermore, processes of nation-building and development progress also all play a part in the experience of the individuals. The empirical evidence is drawn from three different companies (a small-medium sized enterprise, multinational company and government-linked company) across various industries (media, electronics and manufacturing), which represents a significant proportion of the Singaporean economy (see further discussion in chapter 4 and 5). In addition, personal embedded experiences and capabilities such as language, education and work experience can be amalgamated with the societal culture to affect corporate culture at the workplace. Chapter 3 will start with examining the economic organisation (Chinese capitalism) that is dominant in Singapore and chapter 4 will evaluate the political economy of Singapore.

Chapter 3

Contemporary Chinese Capitalism

"Chineseness is no longer, if it ever was, a property or essence of a person calculated by that person's having more or fewer 'Chinese' values or norms, but instead can be understood only in terms of the multiplicity of ways in which 'being Chinese' is an inscribed relation of persons and groups to forces and processes associated with global capitalism and its modernities."

(Nonini and Ong, 1997, pp. 3 – 4)

3.1   Introduction

Following the discussion in Chapter 2, this chapter explores how the economic system

of a particular region can have a deep impact on society, and affect how 'things are

done' in the corporate environment. In the past few centuries, millions of ethnic

Chinese people in East and Southeast Asia have engaged in a distinctive form of

economic organisation through which Chinese entrepreneurs, traders, financiers and

their closely-knit networks of family members and friends came to dominate the

economic space of the host economies which they later settled and eventually made

home (Lim, 2000; Yeung, 2004). While deeply rooted in the cultural norms and social

values of the traditional Chinese society in mainland China, this form of economic

organisation has evolved and adapted to dramatically different institutional contexts

and political-economic conditions. Yeung (2004) uses the term 'Chinese capitalism' as a heuristic device to describe this historically and geographically specific form of economic organisation that refers to the social organisation and political economy of the so-called 'overseas Chinese' living outside mainland China, particularly in East and Southeast Asia (for example, Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam). Chinese capitalism is a dominant mode of economic organisation in East and Southeast Asia not only because of its economic significance in the host economies, but also due to its intertwining, complex and intricate social organisation. The sheer diversity and dexterity of economic activities controlled and coordinated by these ethnic Chinese have enabled some of them to become the foundations and support of the Asian economies in which they reside and operate.

This chapter explores contemporary debates around Chinese capitalism, with a particular focus on Southeast Asia. In the discussion, key features of Chinese capitalism will be examined; showing how attributes of Chinese business in Southeast Asia act as a catalyst in economic development. Folk and Jomo (2003) suggests that there is considerable diversity among firms, and economic and political networks in Southeast Asia. According to Folk and Jomo (2003), much of this diversity is due to the key features of Chinese businesses – business-government relations, family firms, trust, networks and 'Asian' values. Such features are also affected by the local embedded characteristics and the involvement of the state (Huang, 2010), changing the way ethnic Chinese businesses function in different political contexts.

The origins of Asian values can be traced in religious and philosophical texts, and are a combination of both religious and secular values (Cauquelin *et al*, 2000). According to Cauqueline *et* al (2000), Asian values include 1) the continuing existence of cohesive and strong family ties in a basically paternalistic structure; a sense of loyalty to blood ties, 2) filial piety and respect for age and seniority; respect and status increase with age in the workplace with the older members of society seen as mentors to the younger members, 3) importance of cultivating and developing personal contacts and networks (*ningen kankei* in Japanese, *guanxi* in Chinese), 4) importance of 'face' or *mianzi*; it is understood as dignity, self-respect, prestige and status, 5) education is important as it prepares the individual for one's place in society, 6) importance of protocol, rank and status (Cauquelin *et al*, 2000). Chinese capitalism is a mode of economic organisation which encompasses such Asian values, practices and the regional political system it is situated in. Extending this argument into processes of economic globalisation, Yeung (2004) argues that not only does Chinese capitalism consist of distinctive characteristics, it is also capable of participating and contributing to the shaping of globalisation. The so-called 'crony capitalism' which is the conventional notion of Chinese capitalism, based around kinship networks, is often misunderstood to be traditional and unaffected by globalisation. Yeung (2004) argues that this to be untrue and in contemporary Chinese capitalism, key actors are capable of participating in the globalisation process, injecting their own influence, to the extent of significantly transforming the nature and organisation of Chinese capitalism in East and Southeast Asia.

Business systems in Asia are characterised by the differentiated role of 'inward-looking' inter-firm networks, excessive reliance on personal relationships in business

transactions and the strong intervention of the state (Redding, 1990). In section 3.2, I explore the current debate on Chinese capitalism (Redding, 2004; Hamilton, 2004; Yeung, 2004; Redding and Witt, 2007; Huang, 2010) to give further insights into this phenomenon. In 3.3, business structures and networks are examined (Bolt, 2000; Yao, 2003; Suryadinata, 2004) to illustrate how Chinese businesses operate in Southeast Asia. In section 3.4, I discuss how the Chinese business and community in the region contribute not only to the economic activities and growth of the region (Lim, 2000; Tan, 2004; Liu 2009) but also how they play a part in the nation building process. Furthermore, Chinese business networks and community account for the presence (and growth) of Confucianism and use of Chinese language in the region. Finally, in the concluding section, the notion of a hybrid Chinese capitalism is explored to reflect the realities of the situation in the Southeast Asian region. It is important to note that Asian style of business systems do not necessary mean Chinese style of business systems. Asian style of business systems can include those of Japan, India, South Korea and many other countries in the region. There are also differences and variation of Chinese capitalism (Yeung, 2004). In this chapter and thesis, I use the term to refer to Chinese capitalism being practiced by ethnic Chinese outside mainland China, and within Southeast Asia. The discussion in this chapter adds another dimension to the conceptualisation of corporate culture; providing the context of the economic organisation, and how it can influence business practices.

3.2   Chinese Capitalism: Current Debates

There is much misunderstanding of Chinese capitalism in the popular literature and mass media. Chinese capitalism has often been seen as static and self-contained within peculiar social and political contexts in East and Southeast Asia (see Hodder, 1996).

During and after the 1997/8 financial crisis, this misreading of Chinese capitalism and its social practices contributed to the widely circulated 'crony capitalism' argument that hindered the rescue efforts by international organisations such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. However, based on the significant contributions of Redding (1990), Hamilton (1999, 2004) and Whitley (1994), Yeung (2004), Jomo (2003), Redding and Witt (2010), and Huang (2010), we have some clarity on the nature and development of Chinese capitalism, as a relatively distinct and coherent phenomenon. This is indeed the underlying logic of Redding's (1990) work *The Spirit of Chinese Capitalism* in which he started with the assumption that there is a distinct trend to be explained and justified. Through examining the nature and dynamics of Chinese capitalism in East and Southeast Asia, this chapter will shed some light on the 'mystery' and (mis)understanding of Chinese capitalism.

A particular form of economic organisation known as Chinese capitalism has evolved and dramatically adapted to the various different institutional contexts and political-economic conditions in different host Asian economies (see Redding, 1990; Folk and Jomo, 2003; Hamilton 2004; Yeung 2004; Redding and Witt, 2010). Chinese capitalism is not only a significant mode of economic organisation in East and Southeast Asia, but it is also a complex and yet versatile social organisation and political system in the host economies (Yeung, 2004). Chinese capitalism has had a definite socio-economic impact on the development of the economies in the region (Folk and Jomo, 2003; Suryadinata, 2004; Huang, 2010). The sheer range and prowess of the economic activities controlled and coordinated by these ethnic Chinese have enabled some of them to become the very foundations of the Asian economies which they inhabit and function in (Yeung, 2004), and it continues to develop and impact the

growth of the region (Huang, 2010). This vibrant economic growth in East and Southeast Asia has not only been of interest to Western businesses as commercial opportunities but also provides a fertile ground for academic research. In particular, Redding and Witt (2010) emphasised the connectedness and complexity of Chinese capitalism to have a significant impact on the shape of the international political arena, and political governance in China and other Asian states. Hasan (2008) goes further to suggest that the contemporary Chinese capitalism has led to the reconfigurations of classes, and has significant political ramifications.

The study of ethnic Chinese capitalism in Southeast Asia has served as a platform for many scholars in various disciplines. However, their conceptions typically contain strong normative overtones and the discourse is still basically essentialist (Folk and Jomo, 2003). The linkages between the relationship (cultural and business) of China and Asia's ethnic Chinese continues to provide further opportunities for exploration. Moreover, ethnic identity is not a simple concept to define (Bolt, 2000). Ethnic identity amongst Chinese is complex and complicated (see Ang, 2001; Hsing, 2003; Quah, 2009). According to Bolt (2000), most groups perceive ethnic identity as descending from a common ancestry or even being conceived of as extended kinship networks. It is often implied and suggested that there is a certain common but unique Chineseness to the organisation, culture, norms and practices of businesses owned and managed by ethnic Chinese in the Southeast Asian region (Hong, 1998). Folk and Jomo (2003) argue that with the possible exception of Singapore and (sometimes) Thailand, ethnic Chinese businesses are assumed to have similar characteristics throughout the region. This is due to the common condition that ethnic minorities are often subjected to; discrimination and even exclusion by hostile states dominated by

indigenous majorities. There are however, some variations to this basic theme, admitted to accommodate the variety of ethnic Chinese business experiences in the region. Sometimes, ethnic differences were implied, but more often than not, cultural differences were also highlighted (Suriyadinata, 2005). Some of the most active and more prominent recent debates in the literature have dealt with the differing attitudes – manifested in the workings of ethnic Chinese businesses, and prevalent under conditions of deepening liberalisation (Folk and Jomo, 2003; Redding and Witt, 2010). Yeung (2004) reinforces this and goes further to argue that Chinese capitalism is also capable of engaging and participating in the processes of globalisation. Redding and Witt (2010) suggest the complexity of Chinese capitalism can change the evolution of Chinese governance and international political arena, as these connections continue to develop through various ethnic business networks.

Lim (2000) argues that a positive account of the beneficial effects of risk-taking, entrepreneurialism, government connections, and the conglomerate structure typical of Chinese business under what used to be considered 'normal' conditions of national economic growth in Southeast Asia, are part of the distinctive features of Chinese capitalism. However, on the other side of this coin, there are also tendencies towards what are now seen as 'excessive borrowing', 'over-investment' and related-party lending without sufficient measures to attend to risk management. Thus, it is argued that in 1997, this practice which contributed to rapid growth also led to financial collapse in Southeast Asia (see Beaverstock and Doel, 2001). At the same time, the Southeast Asian economies were weakened and created excess capacity in the industrial and property sectors.

The traditional 'guarding' of family businesses (or traditionalist style of running businesses), is often labelled as an inward-looking system, and has been attributed as one of the reasons contributing to the 1997/ 98 economic crisis. For example, when it concerns financial liberalisation, the trend towards institutional development and foreign direct investment (FDI) liberalisation, the pattern is usually moving against the grain of the older generations and their negative perception of financial modernisation (Orru *et al*, 1997). In ethnic Chinese business, there is a heavy reliance upon family-sourced labour and management becomes intrinsically uncompetitive. The result is a tendency towards decline in traditional social networks and personalised business-client linkages. On the other hand, Tan (2000) argues that the 'political *guanxi*' or political 'special' connections reflect how the patronage-based strategic alliances between Chinese business networks and state elites are premised upon uninterrupted growth to underwrite the distribution of wealth, and that these relationships can certainly come under severe strain when favourable conditions are not present. These developments serve as reminders that while economic and political *guanxi* networks are often (correctly) seen as informally institutionalised strategies facilitating exchange relations and accumulation within the context of weak formal institutions, these arrangements are always malleable and subject to (re)negotiations. Thus, Chinese capitalism can be treated as a virulent variety of capitalism and a business system which is unstable and susceptible to the evolving macro-economic and political situation. This can impact the way in which a company and the workers behave and operate. However, Chinese capitalism is not explicitly reflected in the corporate culture literature, and this thesis contributes to filling this knowledge gap.

Accounting for the Chinese capital in Southeast Asia is not an easy task, as establishing the number of ethnic Chinese in region is complex. Not only is ethnicity a subjective indicator, ethnicity also depends upon the label that others ascribe to him/her (Bolt, 2000). Thus, it can be difficult to define who is, and who is not Chinese. Many Southeast Asian Chinese have mixed ancestry and have adopted local names (especially in Indonesia and Thailand) and the same customs as their neighbours. Under such circumstances there is no simple, objective test for an outsider to determine who is Chinese. Further, counting the number of ethnic Chinese can also be a politically sensitive task. Thus, researchers must attempt to estimate the number of ethnic Chinese in Asia, and in the world. Figures for the number of ethnic Chinese outside mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan range from 26 million to 33 million, and it is estimated that 80 percent of them live in Southeast Asia (Yeung, 2004). Therefore, the number of Chinese in Southeast Asia ranges from 20.2 million to 25.7 million, approximately 5 percent of the total population of the region. The Chinese outside mainland China are known to have substantial financial assets. This does not mean that all Chinese are rich. Chinese throughout the region are found in various socio-economic levels, a point that is often lost in discussions of Chinese wealth. Nevertheless, large Chinese companies have access to substantial sums of money. However, estimates of Chinese wealth are even more speculative than estimates of the number of Chinese in Southeast Asia. As ethnic Chinese capital is difficult to identify, it is often labelled 'shadow capital' (Bolt, 2000). Due to frequent violence against the ethnic Chinese and efforts by governments to access Chinese wealth, it makes good sense for companies and individuals to 'camouflage' their assets. Adding to the difficulties of assessment, the effects of the Asian financial crisis on Chinese wealth are not fully known at this point, although one estimate (Bolt, 2000) calculated a near-

halving in the asset value of the top five hundred overseas Chinese companies in 1998. Table 1 illustrates data reflecting a relative high percentage of recorded Chinese wealth, the pre-1997 financial crisis. It would be even higher if the unrecorded wealth was taken into consideration. The Chinese wealth in the region reflects the economic situation of the area. This affects the flows, patterns and processes of the Chinese business organisation of the region.

Table 1: Comparative Wealth of Chinese in Southeast Asia

Countries	Chinese Business Output as Percentage of Total Local Economy	Percent of Listed Companies Owned by Chinese
Malaysia	60%	61%
Indonesia	50%	73%
Thailand	50%	81%
Philippines	40%	50%
Singapore	76%	81%

Source: *The Economist*, 9 March 1996

What then distinguishes Chinese capitalism from other forms of economic organisation? It is not the purpose of this chapter to compare the success and failure of different varieties of capitalism as it is beyond the effort of even established scholars.

Rather, it is interesting and important to describe and explain the changing dynamics of Chinese capitalism in relation to globalisation and how these changes and transformations have led to the emergence of Chinese capitalism as a form of hybrid capitalism (Yeung, 2004). To distinguish Chinese capitalism as a distinct mode of economic organisation in East and Southeast Asia today, it is thus reasonable to identify it with a set of common denominators so that subsequent changes and transformation can be identified. Yeung (2004) categorises four key defining attributes in Chinese capitalism.

First, Chinese capitalism refers to an institutionalised mode of economic organisation that operates largely outside mainland China. It is rationalised and represented by a particular kind of economic institution: the Chinese family firm. The family firm serves as the key organisational platform or 'mode of organising'. While historically capitalistic enterprises might not have been developed in China, Chinese capitalism is organised around a particular social system of economic action and business activities that manifests itself through complex webs of family networks and personal relationships (Yeung, 2004). It is embedded in a peculiar form of political economy in which the ethnic Chinese rule the host economy and leave the political sphere to the reign of indigenous ethnic groups or colonial masters. Chinese capitalism is thus organised and coordinated via neither market relations nor hierarchies of firms. Instead, it encompasses both markets and hierarchies and configures these capitalist institutions through an informal system of social relationships and family obligations (Hamilton, 2000). Redding (1990), a leading scholar of Chinese capitalism, observed that it has evolved to be more adventurous and the effectiveness of its development stems from the intense managerial dedication and the efficiency of the employees of

the same culture. This is only possible as they share and create a common and familiar business environment to operate. Similarly, Brown (2000) argues that the key institution in Chinese business has always been the family. I suggest that Chinese capitalism offers an additional dimension to the conceptualisation of corporate culture. The way in which businesses operate under Chinese capitalism, can change how their corporate culture is influenced.

Second, Chinese capitalism is not a mode of economic organisation bound within specific territorial boundaries of nation-states. It is instead a malleable form of capitalism that is embedded in (but not limited by) the institutional contexts of the 'home' economies. Chinese capitalism is not confined to an absolute political space the way many other forms of capitalism have been. Instead, Chinese capitalism occupies an economic space (Hamilton, 2004). Furthermore, rather than equating it with the national economy, it is best conceptualised as locations where specific activities occur (Hamilton, 1999, 2004). Brown (2000) also recognises that the rapid economic and geographical expansion of Chinese firms in Southeast Asia means that a description of Chinese capitalism must cover different countries. So, from this account of Chinese businesses, Chinese capitalism has no clear-cut political boundaries. Instead, it can only be delimited by the geographic extent and spread of its economic activities. This attribute poses a problem to the analysis of comparative capitalism and business systems in economic sociology and international political economy because most studies in these two fields focus on the development and institutionalisation of different 'varieties' of capitalism in distinctive national contexts, for example, the US and the UK compared with Germany and Japan (Yeung, 2004). Thus, Chinese capitalism should be envisaged as a transnational form of economic organisation. This

flexible territoriality of Chinese capitalism partly explains why several leading sociologists of Chinese capitalism tend to focus on Hong Kong and Taiwan (instead of other Southeast Asian countries) as their primary geographical target of analysis because ethnic homogeneity in these two economies tends to facilitate the analysis of a distinctive business system. However, even in these two ethnic Chinese economies, the issues of national sovereignty and territorial boundedness remain highly contested and questionable. This is due to the large diaspora of ethnic Chinese residing in USA, Canada, Australia and UK. They maintain very close contact with their home countries (see Ley and Waters, 2004). In fact, many of them still maintain two homes as their business activities often span across national borders.

Third, Chinese capitalism has achieved some degree of structural coherence and rationality. Through centuries of distinctive cultural practices and social organisation originating from imperial China, this identifiable capitalism with China as the Middle Kingdom in its historical times differentiates Chinese capitalism from the economic organisation of other diaspora groups such as Jews. These cultural practices serve as the underlying logic for distinctive economic behaviour and social action among ethnic Chinese. In many ways, most ethnic Chinese identify with this structural coherence and rationality that in turn legitimises their very socio-economic behaviour. In short, there is a kind of economic culture, defined by Berger (1986) as 'structures of consciousness', that constitutes Chinese capitalism (Yeung, 2004). This cultural coherence in Chinese capitalism is similar to Storper and Salais's (1997) idea of the economy as a hybrid object constituted through a diversity of conventions and worlds of production in which actors organise and legitimise their action and behaviour. Thus, the world of conventions in which Chinese capitalism is situated can be best

described as the interpersonal world, whereby economic activities are conducted and legitimised through interpersonal relationships and networks (Yeung, 2004).

Fourth, unlike its Anglo-American counterpart analysed in the new institutionalism literature, Chinese capitalism is actor-centred rather than institution-specific. The lack of a formal institution means that individuals within the regional countries form their own business networks via the route of ethnic ties and relations. Whitley (1999) argues that the units of economic decision-making and control vary considerably in their constitution and organisation across different capitalist economies. Firms may not be the only economic actors in the various economies. In the absence of formal legal structures and political systems that are unique to ethnic Chinese outside mainland China, social actors such as families and their business groups have become the primary driving force in Chinese capitalism (see Bolt, 2000; Hamilton, 2004; Redding and Witt, 2010) . To a certain extent, this actor-specific constitution of Chinese capitalism is related to the 'geopolitical anxiety' of ethnic Chinese in East and Southeast Asia (Yeung, 2004). Their geographical dispersal during the past two centuries and their lack of political power in the host economies of Southeast Asia have greatly increased their geopolitical concerns that in turn legitimises their reliance on family-based actors rather than host-country institutions to coordinate their social and economic activities (Hodder, 1996; Nonini and Ong, 1997). While these actors are influenced by the formal rules and regulations of their host economies (for example, property rights and ownership requirements), their capacity to go beyond territorial boundaries enables them to exploit inherent advantages embedded in different formalised regulatory systems throughout East and Southeast Asian economies.

The concept of culture in Chinese capitalism needs to be reconceptualised as a catalogue of historically contingent and geographically specific practices that respond and adapt to changing local, regional and global circumstances rather than as permanently fixed mental and organisational structures that resist challenges and pressures to change (Yeung, 2004). The perspective of Chinese capitalism as hybrid capitalism is thus particularly relevant as Chinese capitalism undergoes dynamic transformations and increases in its economic and organisational complexity throughout different East and Southeast Asian economies, and their business structures and networks.

3.3   Explaining Chinese Capitalism: Structures and Networks

Although the 'overseas Chinese' have been a subject of study for a long time, academic studies of 'overseas Chinese capitalism' are relatively recent, originating in the mid-1980s. Today, Chinese capitalism has become an important subject for multi-disciplinary research. There are studies on the spirit of 'overseas Chinese' capitalism; Chinese business systems; and political-economic alliances in Southeast Asian countries (Yeung and Olds, 2000). It must be noted that these themes are often interrelated and by no means complete. Chinese business networks are often perceived to be predominantly constituted by actors of ethnic Chinese origin and/ or by the domestic institutional contexts that Chinese actors find themselves situated in. This discussion of traditional conceptions of 'Chinese' business networks and Chinese capitalism sets the foundation for the subsequent actor-network informed analysis of the reshaping of contemporary Chinese capitalism.

Beliefs, symbolism and values are the base of the surrounding authority in Chinese culture (for example Confucianism) and this fosters the stability and adaptability of the family firm (Cauquelin *et* al, 1998; Hamilton, 2004). Chinese values legitimise a distinct form of cooperation between organisations and the beliefs and values usually retain long-term legitimacy because of their grounding in Chinese ethics. Economic exchange and growth is enhanced by intra-organisational stability and inter-organisational cooperation and there is no tight linkage between a set of state-supported institutions and the organisational principles of business. Last but not least, kinship relationships are very important in Chinese organisations. Nonetheless, there are some stereotypes in linking beliefs and values to the nature of Chinese capitalism in Southeast Asia.

Perhaps, the best-known attribute of Chinese business systems is the role and extensive penetration of business networks or bamboo networks. Personal relationships or *guanxi* are an important mechanism for implementing cooperative strategies in Chinese businesses, although their importance changes over time and in different places (Luo, 2007). The reliance on personal relationships and business networks, however, is not restricted exclusively to the practices of ethnic Chinese only but it is also seen in the business arena all over the world (Orru *et al*, 1997; Liu, 2009). An examination of the business systems, in the study of Chinese capitalism, provides us with a useful model for understanding the dynamic characteristics of Chinese firms when they cross national boundaries (Liu, 2009). The challenge is to understand how Chinese business systems are reshaped by different institutional structures when their leading firms globalise among different economies and countries. This is a critical issue for our understanding of the impact of globalisation

on actor-specific practices in Chinese capitalism. Also, it has important implications for examining the transferability of Chinese business systems to countries or regions with fundamentally different institutional and cultural structures (Yeung, 2004; Liu 2009; Redding and Witt, 2010). This has always been a highly contested area as there are mixed results when trying to replicate a specific business system in another country (Gomez, 2004). An example would be the Japanese way of car production in Latin America. The result is a hybrid of production systems that originates from Japan but is adapted to suit the local labour force. It is also crucial to evaluate the success of Chinese firms in managing business networks and relationships over space. This manageability of cross-border business networks will determine the success or failure of Chinese capitalism in an era of accelerated globalisation (Yeung and Olds, 2000).

There has been great interest in the structure of ethnic Chinese-owned companies as an explanation for the growth of Chinese businesses. Most writers emphasise the success of Chinese companies but there are those who disagree (see Barr, 2002; Suriyadinata, 2004; Tan, 2004; Yeung, 2004). These disputed issues include the place of Chinese culture in accounting for entrepreneurial success, the role of professional management versus the intuition of an all-powerful head in Chinese firms, the existence of an ethnic characteristic in large multinational companies that are controlled by Chinese, and the technological level of ethnic Chinese enterprises (Bolt, 2000). There are several approaches to the evaluation of ethnic Chinese businesses, depending on size of company and style of management. The generalized picture of the ethnic Chinese company is a small to medium-sized family-owned firm that is controlled by the family patriarch, who rules in an authoritarian manner with the support and cooperation of other family members. This structure allows for quick

79

decision-making and flexibility. Owners traditionally try to avoid debt and preserve a good reputation and spend considerable amount of effort in building and maintaining *guanxi* (connections) with other Chinese companies (see Hodder, 1996; Folk and Jomo, 2003). Therefore, the firm has strong but informal links with Chinese-owned companies throughout Asia, making Chinese businesses seem clanlike and elevating trust as a crucial value in business dealings. In fact, a single informal capital market is said to exist throughout the Chinese diaspora. Amongst most of the existing family businesses, succession is a major problem due to the family-oriented nature of business, and confronting such issues falls on the role of the new leader of the family business to incorporate new modern management practices and recruit professional managers (Tan and Fock, 2001). According to Kopina (2005), it would seem that Chinese businesses tend both to rise quickly and fall within a few generations due to breakdown of *guanxi* and modernization of management process. The notion of *guanxi* is currently missing in the conceptualisation of corporate culture and should be considered when looking at corporate culture in the region.

One of the main explanations of Chinese business success centres on the role of Chinese culture. Gordon Redding (1990), taking a Weberian perspective in searching for a spirit of Chinese capitalism, traces how culture and values influence the business practices of Asia's ethnic Chinese through an economic culture that is distinctively Chinese. Redding (1990) thus insists on the continuing "Chinese" characteristics of Asia's ethnic Chinese. He argues that the Chinese who have migrated remain deeply committed to their Chinese roots and values (Confucianism); the majority of them have not psychologically left China, or at least not left some ideal and perhaps romanticized notion of Chinese civilization. This is the feature which unites them, and

which provides them with one of their most distinctive strengths – a capacity to cooperate based on the common Confucius value system. Thus, Chinese companies, even large firms, retain the traits of family businesses. The second key defining feature of Chinese businesses is their networks. Networks are based on clan or regional identity, personal obligation (such as the relationship between classmates or friends), and the unifying force of Chinese culture and identity. Redding (1995) links the organisational structure of Chinese businesses to a management style that can best be described as patrimonial and personalised. This, too, is a reflection of and response to Chinese society. There are advantages to this type of organisational style in facilitating flexibility and initiating rapid changes of direction, but such a style also prevents talent from developing at lower levels of management, depends on continued family unity and talent, and inhibits size and technological sophistication. It also inhibits influence by professionals from outside the family who may be experts in areas such as accounting or finance. Hodder (1996), on the other hand, rejects the view that culture can explain Southeast Asian Chinese business success. Hodder argues that there is no single Chinese culture that can account for a Chinese approach to business. This is due in part to doubts over the question of who is Chinese, based on the heterogeneity of ethnic Chinese communities and the mixing of ethnicity that occurs throughout Southeast Asia. Hodder (1996) argues that those who defend cultural explanations merely assume the linkage between culture and the variables they wish to explain, such as networks and family businesses in the Philippines where there are both dynamic Chinese and Filipino business communities. However, he also argues the success of ethnic Chinese should be explained by examining the constantly evolving and multidimensional institutions, values, actions, and behaviour, conducted by individuals and groups who possess many different aspects in contributing to a

successful business system. Nonetheless, whilst there is a significant amount of contemporary aspects of societal attitudes incorporated into the Chinese businesses, some of the traditional practices and attitudes are still deeply embedded within Chinese business groups and their 'way of doing things'.

Another area of debate concerning ethnic Chinese business concerns the structure of management. Ethnic Chinese firms often revolve around the family and introducing modern management techniques is a challenge (Kao, 1993; Kopina, 2005). John Kao (1993) of the Harvard Business School notes that most Chinese companies are small. However, even large companies maintain simple organisational structures to keep centralized control in the hands of the patriarch and family members. These "imperial organisations" are passed on to sons after the fathers retire. So, non-family members seldom get close to the top. The major strength of these companies is "knowledge arbitrage", where entrepreneurs use their understanding of differing labour costs, consumer trends, technological developments, and resources in various countries to make profits. However, a weakness is found in the area of management. Although many children of Chinese entrepreneurs do get their master of business administration degrees (MBAs), it is difficult to incorporate outside managers with real authority into a family-run business system that tends to guard information carefully (Lim, 2000; Liu, 2009). Yao Souchou (2003) examines management practices among Chinese traders in Sarawak, especially the use of family labour in the workplace. Yao (2003) argues that the idea of 'Chinese economic familialism' – which emphasises consensus between management and workers, especially those recruited from amongst kin – is a cultural myth. Based on anthropological fieldwork in the township of Belaga in Sarawak, he describes various management practices that attempt to reproduce 'family

relations' in the shops in order to bind workers in a relationship of obligation and control. Instead of showing a perfect matching of expectations of management and workers, the cultural invention of the family is designed to institute and maintain structural differences between workers as outsiders and members of the owner's family. Also, the notion of resistance is made explicit when the discussion focuses on the management practice of *kan dian* or 'watching the shop': a visual surveying of workers' performance in order to monitor and check employees' behaviour. *Kan dian* is a logical outcome of the necessity for surveillance on the part of the management – one that nonetheless opens the way for workers' resistance. Yao (2003) argues against the pitfalls of 'cultural determinism', which arguably underpins the works of Gordon Redding (1990, 1995), Wong Siu-lun (1995) and others. There are indeed both strengths and weaknesses in cultural values with regards to small-scale family businesses. In my research, I address Yao's critique by examining if and how workers relate with management. The evidence shows that the flows, patterns and processes are more complex than Yao suggests.

Nonini (2003) also discusses small-scale Chinese businesses in Peninsular Malaysia based on ethnographic fieldwork in 1978-80, 1985 and 1991-3. There are several major findings. First, subcontracting among small-scale Chinese businesses is common practice in the Malaysian economy. Second, *guanxi* or 'particular relationships' is only one of several ways in which small-scale Chinese businessmen interact with these enterprises. During trading with other small-scale Chinese businesses, interactions are market-driven and relatively impersonal and sometimes even hostile. Third, patriarchal power within the family base of small-scale Chinese businesses comes into contradiction with their low level of capitalisation, generating a

petty accumulation trap that leads to the businesses' eventual demise. Finally, small-scale Chinese businesses and the families involved engage in strategic transnational movement out of Malaysia in response to the business politics of ethnicity and labour markets in Southeast Asia. In another study, Kopina (2005) examines 50 small and medium sized Chinese companies, between 2002 and 2003, and concluded that despite the modernization of the management process, such companies will continue to hire family members. This reiterates the significance of close *guanxi* networks and hierarchies in Chinese businesses.

Rivera (2003) provides an account of the development of the six most prominent Chinese-Filipino business families in the Philippines. Despite the long history of ethnic Chinese in the national economy, the families analysed here represent new money, virtually all of them having become prominent within the last few decades. These groups have maintained their essential character as 'family firms', retaining familial control over the lead companies even while floating stocks or bonds in the financial markets. They have also expanded their operations along the lines of diversified modern conglomerates. Each group has its own flagship operations in banking, finance and real estate development. This very much resembles the modern conglomerates that exist in the West. Having outlined the mode of development of these groups, Rivera (2003) argues that critical to the expansion has been the cultivation of links and partnerships with prominent Filipino political elites. This accounts for the existence of key political figures that have been recruited to serve as powerful executives or partners in the leading groups. While this distinctive style of management and expansion has served the family firms well, a series of new challenges now confronts these groups. These include the issue of inter-generational

succession; increasing dependence on the skills of professional managers; the relative diffusion of political power; and the necessity of adapting to a more harshly competitive regional and international business environment. The families have addressed succession and management issues through advanced professional training abroad and supplementary recruitment measures, and that the families are well placed to adapt to new economic conditions and to maintain their collective hegemonic position in key sectors of the domestic economy. The different scale of the companies affects the 'way they do things around here'.

Mackie (2003) argues that there are differences between various groups of Southeast Asian Chinese and the socio-political contexts in which their businesses operate. Indonesian big business groups differ strikingly from those of Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines and Singapore in many ways. The patterns of their dependence on state and private banks and on the stock exchange for capital and credit were very different from those of their counterparts in other ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) countries. The role of the state is vital to the way in which the businesses operate. Political connections with Soharto (former president of Indonesia) and his entourage were significantly important for some of the largest business groups, to a far greater degree than their counterparts in Malaysia and Thailand. Such connections were much less important for the smaller ones, although most Sino-Indonesian business firms have had to buy political protection from officials of all kinds. Machado (2003) argues that many contemporary assessments exaggerate the integrative power of ethnic Chinese business networks in East Asia. Instead, he argues that Japanese transnational manufacturing production networks have been more influential in the economic development of modern East Asia. Much of the ethnic

Chinese business activities are either part of such networks, or play a subordinate role in the Japanese transnational-centred production networks. He cautions against the overemphasis of Chinese linkages in the economic growth of the region and that Japanese influences are overlooked in the process. However, looking at the size of the expansion of the Chinese economy today, it is very difficult not to concentrate on the strength of the large Chinese business networks in Southeast Asia.

In discussions of ethnic Chinese business, much is made of the concept of networks. Networks are conceived of as one of the pillars of ethnic Chinese business success, and this may in(directly) influence corporate culture. A network can be defined as a web of free-standing participants cohering through shared values and interests, while networking consists of making connections among peers (Lindahl and Thomsen, 2004; Gomez, 2004). Through networks, participants cooperate by way of shared values, interests, and culture. Networks provide support, information, credit and a sense of belonging in a sometimes hostile environment. Chinese business networks are both formal and informal. At the informal level, entrepreneurs with ties based on birthplace, common history, friendship, third-party introduction, or previous business dealing cooperate in sharing information, extending credit, or partnering in profit-making ventures. At the formal level, various mechanisms have been established to foster relations among Chinese businesspersons. For example, the First World Chinese Entrepreneurs Convention (www.wcec-secretariat.org) was held in Singapore in 1991. Subsequent conventions were held every other year in Hong Kong (1993), Bangkok (1995), Vancouver (1997), Melbourne (1999), China (2006) and Singapore (2011). In a keynote address at the second convention, Singapore's senior minister Lee Kuan Yew extolled the benefits of *guanxi* and told the assembled gathering not to be

ashamed of cultivating networks (Bolt, 2000). In addition, traditional associations based on clan, hometown district, or dialect groups have revived and frequent conferences have been held regularly since 1990 (Liu, 1998). It is estimated that over one hundred world conventions of Chinese voluntary associations have been held, backed by prominent business leaders and politicians. For example, the Second World Fujian Convention, organised by the Federation of Hokkien Associations of Malaysia, was held in Langkawi, Malaysia, in September 1996. It was attended by 2500 delegates from 16 countries; Prime Minister Dr. Mahathir Mohamad gave the opening address. In 1999, the Federation of World Hakkas held its fifteenth biennial convention in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The Gan, Guo, Lin, and Shun Clan Associations have all held international conferences as well, and new societies, such as the Chinese Entrepreneurs Society of Canada, are cropping up (Liu, 1998). Many of these bodies have a permanent secretariat and other institutional structures that facilitate worldwide network building and promote dialect-based identities (Bolt, 2000). These linkages also affect how 'things are done' and in chapter 7, I illustrate how such networks and *guanxi* can affect the way in which corporate culture is shaped.

The Internet provides another tool for networking. The Singapore Chamber of Commerce has created a World Chinese Business Network website (www.cbn.com.sg) to provide information on ethnic Chinese companies and to create business opportunities for them. Ethnic Chinese business networks also contribute to the economic integration of Asia as a region. Networks across political borders and cross-border economic interactions are common in spite of the fact that Asia has few formal integrative institutions (Suryadinata, 2004). Chinese networks are also not

limited to Asia. However, in spite of the importance of networks for ethnic Chinese entrepreneurs, their significance must not be exaggerated. First, networking among Chinese does not eliminate divisions. Political tensions still create barriers, and dialect group and cultural differences continue to be relevant (see Wong 1995; Yan, 2002; Yao, 2003). Even language can be a problem. Among many Chinese, English is the only common language, due to the various dialects groups. Furthermore, networks are not exclusive to the Chinese, nor do Chinese network exclusively with other Chinese. In Southeast Asia, there are increasing numbers of business dealings between Chinese and local (indigenous) business groups (Bolt, 2000). This is illustrated with the highly advertised campaigns by the governments of Malaysia and Singapore reinforcing the need to strengthen and forge new opportunities between different ethnic groups in their countries (Suryadinata, 2004). So far, the discussion has covered different business groups, their structures and networks, reflecting the dynamics and complexities of these Chinese businesses. This enhances our understanding of the economic organisation and business system of the region, and adding an additional dimension to how Chinese capitalism can affect corporate culture. In the following section, I discuss how ethnic Chinese businesses play a part in the nation building process as this is a distinct feature of Chinese capitalism in the region.

3. 4   Chinese Businesses and Community: Confucianism, Nation Building and Language

Given the significance of state-building projects by local political elites in Southeast Asia, control over capital (not just the stereo-typically 'suspect' nature of Chinese-controlled capital) is a vital political and economic concern (see Suryadinata, 2004; Tan, 2004; Wang, 2004). The transition from the colonial order to post-colonial regimes saw the relocation and also dislocation of many Chinese businesses. This is

further unsettled by the increasing unpredictability of the new (political) environment. This has resulted in hyper anxiety and lack of trust between Chinese businesses and local political elites (Lim, 2000). In response, Chinese business network organisations began to help organise the distribution of credit and facilitated a kind of networked flexibility that linked and supported individual firms in the context of weak formal market and political institutions (Lim, 2000; Folk and Jomo, 2003; Redding and Witt, 2010). Then, with the consolidation of increasingly interventionist states, certain Chinese businesses, especially the larger groups, found it advantageous to cultivate strategically rent-generating political connections, contributing to nation building, and to promote the Chinese language, as a basis for further expansion and diversification (Suryadinata, 2004). At the same time (and more recently), Chinese business groups have started to incorporate Western-style corporate forms and norms as well as impersonal management practices (see Kopnina, 2005; Yan 2006; Redding and Witt, 2010), reflecting the increasing necessity of business-friendly state policies, in the context of heightened regional and global competition, and is further driven by the spread of local capital markets. Much like 'traditional' corporations, Chinese-controlled conglomerates are being spurred to reinvent existing networks as flexible production systems within competitive industries (Wang, 2004). In this way, the practices of Chinese business groups can be understood as merging the need to accommodate personalised social relations, an aspect of Confucianism, in Southeast Asia with the limits and opportunities presented by the current phase of international capitalism (Folk and Jomo, 2003; Liu 2009). This expansion of ties and networks is also reflected in Yeung's (2004) argument that Chinese capitalism is engaging, and interacting with the rest of the world. It encompasses the features of Chinese

capitalism but also engages with modern style of management systems to interact in the globalisation process.

According to Tan (2004), the ethnic Chinese community in the Southeast Asian region is closely associated with the region's political parties and highly influential in the development of labour relations. Clan associations and dominant Chinese businessmen expend significant resources to support and influence local politics and the nation building process, especially on issues of culture and language (Tan, 2004; Wang, 2004). Here, the culture (specifically the Confucian core), is seen as being critical in ensuring sustainable socio-political stability and progressive economic prosperity. For example, in Singapore, the evolution of the 'Speak Mandarin Campaign' moved from one of reducing the usage of Chinese dialects by the Chinese community to the present elevation of Mandarin as the high language of the Chinese, reflecting the use of language to in the nation-building process. In his speech, Minister for Information and Arts, George Yeo said:

> "If the majority of Chinese Singaporean use Mandarin, not as the mother tongue but as a second language, not used at home and taught in school, the nature of our society will change, and it will be for the worse...
>
> It is worth recapitulating why promoting Mandarin as a high language for Chinese Singaporeans is necessary. The reasons are *both cultural and economic* [emphasis added]. The use of Mandarin will help us preserve and develop our cultural roots... The culture of a people gives its members their internal strengths. Without that internal strength, we will not be able to survive disasters, political turmoil and war. If we use only English, and allow our mother tongue to degenerate into a second language, with Mandarin not used at home and taught only in school, we will lose much of our internal strength and become weak people with shallow roots.
>
> There is also a powerful economic reason to promote Mandarin. The re-emergence of China will have a growing impact on world economics and world politics in the coming decades. Those who speak Mandarin and write Chinese, and understand Chinese culture, will enjoy a considerable advantage

in the next century. Those who are able to master both Chinese and English at a high level will be much sought after."

(Yeo, 1998)

Morris (1946) described language as composed of arbitrary symbols possessing an agreed-upon significance within a community. Furthermore, such symbols have additional implications for society. Besides being used for communicative purposes, language is a system that implies rules and order of the society (Edwards, 1985; Fynsk, 1996). Language can be used as a powerful mechanism to strengthen a community or group. Thus, the relationship between language and societal identity is powerful and complex. The promotion of Chinese language, culture and political values through the nation building process reflects the influence of the Chinese businesses and community. Furthermore, this has a definite impact on the corporate culture of Singapore. In the present literature on Chinese capitalism, language affinity has been suggested as a factor for the growth of ethnic Chinese businesses (Hsing, 1996). I concur with Hsing (1996) and suggest that this should be given more emphasis as it lubricates the processes of Chinese capitalism, and is an understated feature of corporate culture. The ethnic Chinese belong to different nationalities, and have adjusted socially and culturally to their respective local communities and national societies (Tan, 2004). However, literacy in Chinese cannot be taken for granted as many overseas Chinese may not be able to read or speak Chinese (Mandarin), but are fluent in other Chinese dialects (Ang, 2001). The comparative study of Chinese communities worldwide in relation to language and nationality reflects the diversities of Chinese culture and identities. In chapter 6, I discuss further how language plays a significant role in the business community, and how it affects corporate culture.

In addition to the promotion of the Chinese language, Confucianism and Asian values are encouraged within Chinese communities in the Southeast Asia. In Singapore, the Special Assistance Plan (SAP) for schools was introduced in 1979 to promote excellence in academic performance in a Chinese cultural environment. Confucian studies was made an approved subject under the compulsory religious knowledge programme in the mid-1980s (Tan, 2004; Quah, 2009). One of the key highlights was also the infusion of Confucianism into Singapore's political landscape in 1991. According to Weber (1958), modern rational capitalism not only needs technology but also 'rational structures of law and administration'. Weber (1951, 1958) argues that Chinese administration and politics were dominated by the Confucian elite, who manipulated 'Confucian ideology' or Confucianism to consolidate dominance. There is also the argument that this hinders progress but Confucianism was, and still is, an important tradition that influences the masses (Tan, 2004). Nonetheless, Weber (1958) points out that Confucianism is necessary for Chinese capitalism and deep rooted in Chinese culture; Chinese values play a part in economic pursuit and reinforce the motivation for economic success amongst ethnic Chinese. In traditional China, economic or intellectual success leads to the glorification of one's family and ancestors, and this symbolises prestige and status not only to the individual, but to the whole extended family (see Cauqueline *et* al, 1998; Bolt, 2000; Tan, 2004; Huang 2010; Redding and Witt, 2010). This symbolism or ceremonialism extends to promoting *guanxi*, and can be seen in the scale of events such as marriages and funerals. This practice is also extended and embedded in the Chinese community and Chinese businesses outside China. The Chinese in Southeast Asia continue to organise their social relations under the principle of *guanxi* and the business community

networks to achieve more economic success. Given the history and political situation in Southeast Asia, the Chinese have been able to attain significant economic success by amalgamating such values with the geo-political region and other processes of globalisation. According to Yan (2006), Confucianism places business in a social context and becomes part of the interpersonal networks between family members and colleagues. In chapter 7, I discuss in more detail how Confucianism is deeply embedded in society, and how they may affect corporate culture.

3.5   Conclusion: Towards A Hybrid Capitalism?

There are various distinctive ways of organising economic institutions in different parts of the world (see Yeung, 2004; Redding and Witt, 2010). This stability in capitalist organisations and patterns of economic relationships very often persists in a period of rapid political change, and could be external to the societies concerned. These patterns of social and organisational structuring form different business systems. The phenomenon is relatively stable, and has highlighted various cases of business practices in specific localities and societies. Once established in particular contexts, these business systems may develop considerable cohesion and become resistant to major changes. Even such powerful changes as internationalisation and globalisation are deemed to have only limited effects on the nature of business systems (Whitley, 1999; Witt and Redding, 2009). Furthermore, when and after they are transformed, these distinctive systems of economic organisation still show the traces of conflicts between opposing conceptions of capitalism and their allied institutional arrangements and interest groups (Whitley, 1999; Witt and Redding, 2009). A business systems perspective is particularly relevant in analysing the political economies of the Asia-Pacific region, where business systems are socially

and institutionally embedded. This affects the 'way things are done here'. Although much of the literature on Chinese capitalism has examined the imprinting effects of culture and the effects of institutional conditions on the nature and organisation of Chinese capitalism, there is little written about how actor-specific processes in an era of globalisation have contributed to the emergence of a hybrid form of Chinese capitalism (Yeung, 2004). Yeung (2004) argues that globalisation tendencies are undermining certain social and institutional foundations of Chinese capitalism. Today, key actors in Chinese capitalism increasingly face the dilemma of succumbing to the pressures of transparency due to the competition to secure global finance while preserving their traditional practices of network reliance and complex family ownership and control. However, in the globalisation context, there are fewer competitive advantages derived from the reliance on personal relationships on the basis of intra-regional business networks. Instead, the spatiality of business networks has shifted from the intra-regional scale to the global scale and global actor-networks are increasingly influencing the nature and organisation of Chinese capitalism. Thus, globalisation has made possible the complex interpenetration of global actor-networks into Chinese capitalism. Globalisation tendencies also continue to reinforce local differences in business conduct and discursive practices. This tendency towards local differentiation is also a process of creating and reforming hierarchies and structures of national economies. Although the local embeddedness of Chinese firms remains a key source of competitive advantage, this localisation process enables Chinese capitalism to retain some core attributes in a global era and contributes to its growing hybridity in form and organisation. The dynamics of Chinese capitalism depend critically on globalisation tendencies as a major transformational force in the global economy, and have major influences on the business practices and corporate culture of the region.

Chinese capitalism can affect the political and institutional processes and values that shape corporate culture.

The dominant strands of discourse on overseas Chinese capitalism have become more complex and sophisticated. There are variations in Chinese capitalism according to the geo-political region. There is also a rapidly evolving economic landscape in Southeast Asia that makes it difficult to conceptualise as the debates get more complex. This is further accelerated by the East Asian crisis in 1997/8 and the recent financial crisis. However, whilst much of the literature rejects the all too easy essentialism of the earlier celebration of Asian and Confucian values, it also rejects the notion of cronyism and corporate governance failures in Southeast Asia. Instead, it seems to suggest that there exists a rich variety of ethnic Chinese business experiences in the region, not only over time, but also with context, size, market share and activities. The complex and multi-tone picture of ethnic Chinese business activity, organisation, culture, norms and practices in the region continues to change in response to new circumstances and challenges, as it has in the past, over time. While the apparent stereotype is not completely without basis, it can be easily overdrawn and conveniently exaggerated. Such attractively simplistic caricatures often do paint a grey picture of the ethnic Chinese in the region by categorising them according to racial stereotypes. By engaging in a more profound analysis, examining and challenging the interaction between Chinese capitalism and the process of globalisation, it is possible to further understand the complexities of social and business activities in contemporary Southeast Asia.

In the previous chapter, the discussion of corporate culture reflected the knowledge gap, and suggested a wider framework for the conceptualisation of corporate culture. The cultural aspects of the corporate workplace are significant and this chapter has provided some of the context in which the research is based. The debate on corporate culture has confirmed the importance of the company values, the heroes and the rites and rituals of the individuals. However, more importantly, the influences on these components, including the company values and practices must also consider the social and cultural practices of the region where the company is situated. Corporate culture may not necessarily be a set of universal or traditional values and must take into account the role of the corporation and regional economic success; the form of economic practices and how they exist within different economies. I argue that besides taking into account the rites, rituals, ceremonies, symbols and artefacts of the everyday life in the corporate arena, it must also take into consideration other socio-economic factors such as geo-political situation, nation-building process and the variety of capitalism it is situated in, which are absent in the present literature on corporate culture. Corporate culture is not just about the 'way things are done here'; it has to incorporate a wider framework of where the firm is situated. The geographical region matters in the make-up of the factors contributing to the construction of corporate culture. In Southeast Asia, the processes of nation-building, societal values, language and development progress all play a part in shaping the experience of the individuals. These individuals, with their personal embedded experience and capabilities such as language, education and work experience are amalgamated with the societal culture to create the distinct corporate culture at the workplace.

What becomes clear, is that when we delve deeper into the complexities of a society such as Singapore, whether for good or bad, its highly successful economy which has delivered so many material gains to the majority of the resident population over such a short period, is not simply the result of the implementation of some abstract set of rules and conventions necessary for successful businesses. Rather, its economic success – its corporate success – has evolved dynamically drawing on wider and deeply rooted practices and values in the Chinese diaspora which in turn have been modernised and refined in Singapore through things such as military service, nation building and schooling amongst others. In the following next chapter, further political and institutional processes are discussed to reflect how they may shape corporate culture in Singapore.

Chapter 4

Political Economy of Singapore

"We, the citizens of Singapore,

Pledge ourselves as one united people.

Regardless of race, language or religion,

To build ourselves a democratic society.

Based on justice and equality,

So as to achieve happiness, prosperity and progress for our nation."

(The Singapore Pledge[5])

4.1   Introduction

The research for this thesis is situated in the socio-political context of Singapore, a city-state. Following earlier discussion of the socio-cultural context of the region, this chapter explores the recent history and political economy of Singapore, and provides the necessary contextual background that is crucial to a more complete conceptualisation of corporate culture in Singapore. The sections to follow will shed light on Singapore as a developmental state, account for its political background, illustrate the legacy left by colonial administration and the rapid economic

---

[5] The Singapore Pledge is recited during daily assemblies at primary, secondary schools and junior colleges. It is also part of a national day celebration song which is aired on TV, radio and at national events, such as National Day parades and government-linked organisations' internal and external functions.

transformation that took place within a relatively short period. The process may not be 'typical' of a democratic society but illustrates the reasons why and how the government takes on such a particular role in the development of Singapore. Researchers have given much attention to Singapore in the last two decades. The available literature is either congratulatory of the city-state's achievement or critical of the police-state domestic policies. Nonetheless, it is important to have a balanced discussion. Singapore continues to fascinate many researchers due to its rapid economic success despite its relatively small size and lack of previous national identity. In section 4.2, I examine the history and legacy left by colonialism. This provides insights into the system of government and involvement of the state in the development of Singapore. In section 4.3, the role of the government in the growth of the Singapore economy is assessed. The main characteristics of the government are illustrated to reflect the intimate relationship between the government and economy. Section 4.4 explores the close collaboration between the political, administrative and military personnel. Section 4.5 explores the labour regime of Singapore. The nature of labour management provides a clearer picture of the characteristics of the workforce. In the concluding section, I draw the discussion to a close by reflecting on how the political economy of Singapore has a 'unique' footprint that can affect corporate culture.

4.2   Setting the Context

Examining the history and legacy left by colonialism provides insights into the system of government and involvement of the state in the development of Singapore. These political and institutional processes influence the societal embeddedness, and shape corporate culture in Singapore. In the nineteenth century, under British rule, Singapore

developed as a free port. After the opening of the Suez canal in 1869, Singapore emerged as the premier port in Southeast Asia, serving as the intermediary between European traders and regional merchants (see Chan, 1991; Gopinathan, 1991). As a free port, it served both Asian and Western private enterprise without the burden of monopolies, duties and other forms of trade restrictions. In the 1960s, Southeast Asia (SEA) developed as a centre of manufacturing supplying the world market. The old trade in raw materials diminished with the demise of colonial rule. In the 1970s, there was an increase in the textiles, garments and electronics industries in Singapore as the local labour cost was comparatively low.

Since independence in 1965, Singapore has achieved an annual average growth rate of 9% (Parry *et al*, 1997). In the World Development Report 2010, Singapore's gross national income per capita for 2008 is US$34 760, compared to US$45 390 for United Kingdom, US$ 47 580 for USA, US$ 6 970 for Malaysia, and US$27 940 for New Zealand. These figures reflect the position and strength of the Singapore economy, and explain why many foreign corporations set up branches or headquarters for the region in Singapore. Indeed, Singapore acts as a role model of economic development and good government economic management (Huff, 1994; Schein, 1996). In the 1950s, Singapore was the most important communication hub in the region especially in the shipping and maritime industry. By the mid 1960s, Singapore embarked on a manufacturing oriented industry targeting the garments, textiles and electronic industries. In 1973, manufactured goods exceeded Singapore's primary commodity exports (Huff, 1994). The petroleum refining industry has always been vibrant in Singapore with Shell, Esso, Mobil, British Petroleum and the Singapore Refining Company processing over 80, 000 barrels per day by the early 1980s. In the mid

1980s, Singapore's role as an international financial centre was established (Regnier, 1991). Singapore benefits from being the world's main East-West communication network and this paved the way for the growth of international financial institutions and financial intermediation services to cater to the expansion of multinational business networks (Huff, 1994; Austin, 2009). In the 1990s, within the service sector, there was a shift from commercial to financial and business services re-confirming Singapore as a regional headquarters hub. Although there has been an increase in local companies, there is still much dependence on foreign companies. Foreign companies account for nearly three-quarters of economic activities. The electronics industry and the petroleum refining industry produced a significant and large share of GDP. The next most important sectors are the transport equipment and metal products, both closely related to petroleum refining sector and maritime engineering sector. According to Regnier (1991), in terms of GDP contribution, financial and business services are ranked ahead of the manufacturing sector. Also, Singapore is one of the top ten international banking centres and accounts for 5% of international banking activity.

Another significant feature of the Singapore economy is the transport and travel industry. As Perry *et al* (1997) write:

> "Port, distribution and warehousing activity continue to benefit from the island's strategic location in relation to international commerce. In terms of tonnage of ships handled, Singapore became the world's busiest port in the 1980s, surpassing Rotterdam and Kobe and is the largest container terminal operation... All Southeast Asian international airports benefit from their strategic location in relation to European-Australasian air traffic, but Singapore has been the most successful in encouraging travellers to break route at its airport. Assisted by this, Singapore International Airlines has grown into one of the world's leading carriers. In 1994, the airline was the world's sixteenth largest operation revenue... Singapore's airline alone contributes around 5% of GDP..."

(ibid, p. 119)

101

The infrastructure not only facilitates Singapore's position as a centre of regional financial and business services but also helps to promote a more attractive and conducive place for the tourism industry. This section has briefly discussed the recent history of Singapore. The legacy left by colonialism was the need to establish economic stability and growth whilst still searching for an identity as a nation-state. In the process, official administrative processes were 'instructive' and 'prescriptive' to ensure optimal efficiency in the running of the country. This 'way of doing things' can also be seen in other aspects of the political economy, such as labour regime, population policy, national service and nation building. These processes inevitably affect the societal characteristics of the people and influence the way they carry out their everyday lives at the workplace; affecting corporate culture. In chapter 6, I discuss such implications and effect of the political economy of Singapore on corporate culture. In the next section, the role of the government is discussed in more detail to further reflect how 'things are done here'.

4.3   State Intervention in the Singaporean Economy

The Singapore economy has been seen as predominantly *laissez faire* but 'directed' by much state regulation and control (Henderson, 1993; Austin, 2009). Chang's (2003) empirical studies demonstrate that values and actions of the Singapore government had been central in the advancement of a poor entrepot city to an industrialised state. In addition, key components of the domestic economy are in full or partial public ownership, and subject to government advice and direction. Economic development has been closely coordinated between senior ministers and civil servants. This is illuminated in the examples discussed in this chapter. In the Singapore Telecom

102

(SingTel) case, a privatised but government linked corporation (GLC), there are government officials, top military personnel and multinational corporation executives taking seats on the board of directors. This reflects the nature of the corporate field. There is a very close relationship between the corporate world and the government, which invariably impacts on the shaping of corporate culture.

There are five categories of state intervention: agencies, incentives, infrastructure, workforce control and economic management (Quah, 1998). The state relies heavily on a number of agencies and GLCs to develop and modernise the economy. There is a wide spectrum of agencies involved, and they continue to multiply with the development of Singapore. The Economic Development Board (EDB) was established in 1961. It functions as the development branch of the Ministry of Trade and Industry. This is a powerful agency that oversees the work of most of the other development agencies in Singapore. The EDB functions as an investment promotion agency, focussing on attracting foreign direct investments into the local economy and expansion of local corporations (Bando, 1990; Schein, 1996). It also operates as an employment agency, headhunting talented Singaporeans from abroad and foreigners. There are four features of the EDB that makes it distinctive from other development agencies across the world (Perry *et al*, 1997). Firstly, the EDB has immense discretion over the way it determines eligibility for tax incentives and assistance packages. Thus, many companies are more than willing to cooperate with the EDB in development programmes so as not to miss out on many of the incentives available. Secondly, it has the authority to start any new business projects either as a direct investor or appointing GLCs to be involved. Thirdly, the wide range of incentive schemes and information available ensures that opportunities are optimised to boost the economy. This is

illuminated by the ever increasing number of multinational corporations (MNCs) setting up their offices in Singapore. Lastly, the EDB is a part of the government and directly reports to senior ministers. The implication of this is there is little or no dispute over the authority and actions of the agency. In fact, having a stamp of approval by EDB and being part of one of its development programmes is seen to be having preferential treatment from other government agencies and financial institutions (Bando, 1990; Schein, 1996). The following illustrates the role of EDB by Singapore's Mentor Minister Lee Kuan Yew; reflecting the significance of MNCs' presence in Singapore:

> "The world's second-biggest computer maker, Hewlett-Packard, has turned to Singapore to staff its research needs… HP, second in size only to Dell, is making Singapore its sole hardware development centre worldwide for its key computer networking product, HP ProCurve, in a $55 million investment over three years. The announcement yesterday was hailed as a 'significant' development by Economic Development Board chairman Teo Ming Kian."

(Lee, 2003b)

Another example is USA based Cisco Systems, which relocated its Asia-Pacific testing laboratory from Sydney to Singapore. The laboratory is the only one in Asia and there are two in the USA and three in Europe. Mr Carney, the vice-president of the laboratory cited the country's 'highly-educated' population and 'good and supportive' government policies as reasons to site the laboratory there (Lee, 2003a). These events reflect the EDB's capacity to assist and provide for the upgrading of an industry in Singapore. However, this prestigious agency may prove cumbersome at times; Perry *et al* (1997) discuss a case that illustrates this sticky problem. In 1996, Singapore Technologies (a GLC) acquired the Singapore operations of the US disk drive manufacturer Micropolis. A rival manufacturer (Seagate Technology) pointed

out that the managing director of Singapore Technologies is also the deputy chairman of the EDB. Thus, Seagate Technology announced that they were not prepared to face competition from a country rather than a firm and might redirect their operations elsewhere.

After the mid-1980's recession, the role of EDB became more pronounced and diversified. In 1986, the Services Promotion Division was established within the EDB to promote Singapore as a regional headquarters centre for foreign corporations and attract other service industries. In the same year, the Small Enterprise Bureau (which later became Enterprise Development Division in 1990) was created to help local enterprises take off. The implication of such changes reflects the dominance of state-related commercial activities. These events leave a mark on the way in which corporate activities function and evolve.

In 1983, the Trade Development Board (TDB) was set up to promote international trade. This was done by assisting local and foreign companies through offices in Singapore and overseas (Bando, 1990; Schein, 1996). The role is mainly business development and this involves representing local companies at international trade fairs and assisting foreign companies to access any resources in Singapore. It also offers taxation incentives to companies involved in ship fleet management, aircraft leasing and international commodity trading. In 1996, the Singapore Productivity and Standards Board (PSB) was established through the merging of the National Productivity Board (NPB, established 1972) and the Singapore Institute of Standards and Industrial Research (SISIR, established 1969). The PSB's main role is to train and certify skilled workers for the economy. In 1997, it embarked on a ten-year plan to

start a certification system to recognise skills attained from work and to mark out skill development directions for a spectrum of occupations. Another responsibility of the PSB was to promote SMEs. The productivity campaign not only improved the quality and standard of the workforce but also ensured that the standards are on par with ISO requirements (Perry *et al*, 1997). The Jurong Town Corporation (JTC) was directly responsible for the development of Singapore's industrial infrastructure. Its facilities included an industrial port, facilities for petroleum and petrochemical industry, shipyards, industrial land and factory plants. In 1995, JTC managed 30 industrial estates, accommodating 6500 companies and 80% of the total manufacturing workforce. It had a subsidiary agency – Jurong Environmental Engineering, which worked closely with the EDB on many overseas projects.

Government-Linked Companies or Corporations (GLCs) refers to the large indigenous enterprises. For example, the national airline, shipping line, major shipyards and chunks of the petrochemical industry are majority government-owned. In total, the government has an ownership interest in over 500 companies, comprising over half the 500 largest businesses in Singapore. The total assets of the 15 largest statutory boards and the 47 largest GLCS amounted to $167.4 billion in 1993, equivalent to two-thirds of Singapore-owned business assets (Perry *et al*, 1997). The origin of this investment in joint ventures was used to attract strategic industries. Most of the early projects in the Jurong industrial estate arose in this way, such as National Iron and Steel Mills, Jurong Shipyard, National Grain Elevator and Sugar Industries of Singapore (Quah, 1998). This motive for government enterprise continues to be used to bring new technologies to Singapore. The GLCs are mainly administered through three holding companies – Temasek Holdings, Singapore Technology Holdings and

Health Corporation Holdings. Ownership is tiered so that they have ultimate control over other lower tiered companies. The holding companies are not liable to any reporting or submitting of accounts to the Registrar of Companies. Government's influence is maintained via a group of politically trusted senior civil servants appointed to the boards of the GLCs (see Quah, 1998; Perry *et al*, 1997; Bellows, 2009). GLCs provide the government with a significant source of revenue. Indeed, this is vital in our assessment and conceptualisation of the corporate culture in Singapore. GLCs provide a way of marshalling the private sector behind economic planning imperatives (by the government). Temasek is the investment arm of the government of Singapore. This is distinctive as the state still plays an active role in ex-public companies that are now privatised. The role of GLCs is highly significant due to their heavy presence in the economic growth of Singapore. There are always inter-relating activities between GLCs and various non-GLCs. This working relationship and connection between the two groups of organisations contributes to the shaping of patterns and processes in the formation of corporate culture. In chapter 6, further examples are provided to demonstrate how such association can influence the corporate culture.

There is an extensive use of tax incentives and subsidies to spur economic growth in Singapore. From the table below, it is apparent that the EDB has a tremendous amount of power to promote both local and foreign companies. In addition to tax incentives, packages such as low interest loans and other investment subsidies are made available to local enterprises at all levels of development. In order to qualify as a local enterprise, only 30% local ownership is required (www.sedb.gov.sg). This makes it extremely attractive for foreign companies to invest in Singapore with local assistance

and yet not lose control of it. Under the local upgrading programme, the EDB funds a

manager from an MNC to assist its suppliers in upgrading their operations. In the

latest Budget, a series of tax incentives were announced that will make it easier and

more attractive for more Singapore-based trust companies to market their service to

offshore clients. This is a strategy taken by the government to make Singapore the

Switzerland of Asia for managing wealth and becoming a private wealth centre (Koh,

2003; Schein, 1996; Austin, 2009).

Table 4.1 Major tax incentives managed by the EDB in 2008 (source: www.sedb.gov.sg)

Tax Incentive	Scope	Eligibility requirements	Tax concession
Pioneer status	Manufacturing and services	1.The project is above current average levels of industry technology, skills or know how; and 2. No companies in Singapore perform a similar activity without being awarded pioneer status	Exemption of 31% tax on profits arising from pioneer activity. Tax relief period is 5 – 10 years with possible extension at 15 % for 5 yrs
Expansion incentive	Manufacturing and services	For manufacturers, a minimum $10 million investment in new machinery and production equipment.	Exemption of 31% tax on profits arising in excess of pre-expansion level. Tax relief period is 5 yrs
Investment allowance	Manufacturing and services, certain R&D and construction projects, approved projects designed to reduce drinking water consumption	Specified investment to be made within 5 yrs	Exemption of taxable income of an amount equal to a specified level, up to 50% of new fixed investment
Operation headquarters incentive and Business headquarters incentive	Regional headquarters and service centres of foreign companies, head offices of local MNCs	OHQ – minimum qualifications set in terms of office expenditure, employment and regional subsidiaries supported. BHQ – regional management of activities outside of Singapore with commitment to expand this activity	OHQ – income arising from the provision in Singapore of approved services taxed at 10%; other income from overseas subsidiaries or associated companies may be eligible for similar tax relief. Award for 5 – 10 yrs, with extension possible. BHQ – regional office activity given eligibility to other tax incentives

Table 4.1 (continued)

Tax Incentive	Scope	Eligibility requirements	Tax concession
Export of services incentive and warehousing and servicing incentive	Services	Services must be delivered overseas from a Singapore base; company must derive at least 20% of earnings overseas	Tax exemption of 90% of chargeable income for the qualifying export ectivity, for up to 10 yrs. Exemption of 50% in case of warehousing and servicing
Venture capital	Investors (individual or companies) in innovative new ventures	Companies must be at least 50% owned by Singapore citizens or PRs, and incorporated and resident in Singapore for tax	Losses from sale of equity can be offset against the investor's other taxable income
International direct investment	Investment by eligible companies in approved overseas projects	Companies must be at least 50% owned by Singapore citizens or PRs, and incorporated and resident in Singapore for tax	Losses from sale of equity can be offset against the investor's other taxable income
Approved foreign loan	Manufacturing and services	Minimum loan of $20 000 from a foreign lender for the purchase of productive equipment, providing that the tax relief does not increase	Exemption of withholding tax on interest
Approved royalties, fees and development contributions	Manufacturing and services	Tax relief should not increase tax liability in a foreign country	Full or partial exemption of withholding tax on interest

The government of Singapore is the sole supplier of infrastructure in the country, and this arrangement reflects the interventionist role of the government in the development of the state. The management of infrastructure include public transport, port capacity, airport expansions, satellite communications, fibre optic cable network and water management. The following quote illuminates how the government has a close working relationship with non-government organisations in the development of the economy.

> "Government policy on open skies over Changi and SIA's attitudes towards growth and competition were a powerful combination".

> *(Straits Times*, 2003, p. 28)

The funding for this infrastructure is provided by a state-led initiative:

> "The government's control of personal savings and ability to mobilise these resources for domestic capital formation provides the resources to keep ahead of current demand."

(Perry *et al*, 1997, p. 131)

The government's effort and commitment to maintaining the competitiveness of the economy leads to ensuring that infrastructure needed to support the campaign is managed efficiently (Quah, 1998). At the same time, infrastructure is also concerned with national security and the military is included in the planning and operations of such exercises (Huxley, 2000). The case of SingTel illuminates this even further as we see the Chief of Defence of the Singapore Armed Forces not only sitting in one but three of the GLCs that deal with infrastructure planning and operations (Perry *et al*, 1997). The government has an extensive sway over the labour market. These influences include industrial relations, wages, skills formation, productivity performance and the recruitment of foreign workers. The once independent trade union organisations were converted into a state-sponsored National Trades Union Congress (NTUC). Industrial relations are controlled through legislation and the intimate relationship between the government and the NTUC (Coe and Kelly, 2001; Chuan, 2007). This questions the legitimacy of a genuine workers' union. In the 1997 Asian crisis, NTUC's role was seen as a mediating mechanism for the higher management rather than representing the workers.

In the last four decades, Singapore has experienced an economic transformation from developing country to newly industrialising economy to its present status of 'advanced industrialising nation' with the other 'Asian Tigers' economies of Hong Kong, South

Korea and Taiwan (Perry *et al*, 1997). Singapore is now a world city and its fate is very much dependent on global cities such as New York, Tokyo and London as much as the neighbouring countries.

According to Castells (1992), a state is developmental when:

> "... it establishes as its principle of legitimacy its ability to promote and sustain development, understanding by development the combination of steady high rates of economic growth and structural change in the productive system, both domestically and in its relationship to the international economy."

<div align="right">(Castells, 1992, p. 56)</div>

There are two suggestions that were associated with such a developmental process in Singapore. Firstly, the state gives higher priority to changing economic conditions than to social order. Secondly, economic development had an elevated status not only as a mean of survival but also to break away from the dependency of its former colonial authorities (Perry *et al*, 1997). So, the strategy Singapore pursued as a developmental state was first to create economic and political stability before cultivating a cultural identity.

Whatever the economic success achieved, the political style of Singapore's leadership was to establish a stable sense of national security through the promotion of crisis amongst the people. The reality of a constant state of insecurity (from neighbouring countries) caused both the population and government to be on a high alert, and pushed them further to achieve economic stability and progress. Challenges on alternative political agendas were not welcomed as economic stability was first priority (Regnier, 1990; Rodan, 1993; Austin, 2009). This style of political management was very much similar to other 'Asian Tigers' at that particular time period. Singapore, a predominantly Chinese society is in a Malay oriented region,

Hong Kong had doubts about its future with China, Taiwan has still not got international recognition as an independent nation due to pressure from China and South Korea was still estranged from their communist North (Grice and Drakakis-Smith, 1985). These challenges led to an extraordinary close relationship between the military and the government in the developmental process and as we noted above, sees in Singapore senior military figures on the boards of major corporations. It would be unsurprising then to discover that this intense bond has an impact on firms and economic organisation, and affects corporate culture.

In the pursuit of economic growth, Singapore has adopted a modern or 'Western' style of management that suited the local conditions. A democratic system was in place but individual freedom such as freedom of speech was not allowed and the workers' union (NTUC) served more as a recreational organisation rather than one that fought against the employers. Population policies were highly imposing and housing was allocated accordingly to ensure there was no over concentration of an ethnic group in a certain housing estate. Civic education became popular culture and signs were posted everywhere to instruct the local population of public manners and hygiene (Chan, 1987). Arguably, such a strict regime was accepted by the majority as a trade off for economic stability. The emphasis on building a stable state and providing rapid economic growth are consistent with the model of a developmental state (Rodan, 1993, 2004). In Singapore, a strong state was brought about by political control that was held within a single tier of government. This avoided municipal administration. The concentration of power was kept to the most trusted 200 party members (Perry *et al*, 1997; Asher, 2001). All serious political threats were eliminated on the grounds of risking national security.

Arguably, the economic programme brought direct results compared with the limited development that happened in the last few years of colonial administration (see Chan, 1987; Perry *et al*, 1997). The (re)defined governance is a pragmatic approach, and not an ideological position (Austin, 2009), focusing on improving national economic progress. Main elements of the industrialisation strategy included control of wage costs, work force attitude and behaviour, concentration of serviced industrial estates, upgrading of technical education, commercial tax incentives and free remittance of capital. The taxation incentives (Table 4.1) targeted at export-oriented manufacturing and legislation to monitor trade union activity attracted much foreign investment and this was crucial in Singapore's economic development. With rapid economic achievements, the prestige of the People's Action Party (PAP) grew and this ensured the popular acceptance of its following political agenda.

4.4 Government, Military and Politics

In 1959, the first general election was held and the PAP has been in political control until today. Political stability has been upheld with a low turnover of the senior cabinet members. The most well-known politician is Lee Kuan Yew. He became Prime Minister in 1959, retained the position until his retirement in 1990 and is still serving as Mentor Minister within the cabinet (Rodan, 2004). Uninterrupted political control gave PAP the strength to follow through its economic and social programmes. This was regarded as significant in the rapid growth of Singapore as a developmental state (Chan, 1987; Cheng, 1991; Bellows, 2009). The continuous adaptation and application of economic and social policies according to the changing circumstances was enabled by the characteristic of the government, as discussed in the previous

section. This is further aided by the compact geographical scale of the city state. In addition, the concentration of governmental administration in a few large delivery agencies enhanced the effect of policy coordination.

One of the main features of Singapore's political system is the lack of opposition. One argument could be that this political dominance is due to the popularity of the PAP in delivering success and results. However, critics are quick to add that this can also be a case of 'controlled democracy' (Quah, 1988; Rodan, 2004). This is due to constraints on political opposition that created a political system that has, by Western standards, an unusual degree of control and power by a single party government. It has been argued that Singapore's political system is best described as a 'hegemonic party system' in which other political parties are permitted but not on an equal basis (Chan, 1987; Perry *et al*, 1997; Rodan, 2004; Bellows, 2009). The most powerful mechanism is the 1963 Internal Security Act that allows the detention without trial or charge of persons who are suspected of involvement in communist-related activities. Also, genuine press freedom is limited. In 1986, the amendment to the 1974 Newspaper and Printing Presses Act allowed restrictions on the circulation of foreign journals and newspapers which are considered to be dealing with the domestic policies of Singapore. Also, financial ownership is separated from editorial control by the issuing of management shares to Singapore citizens approved by the government. This explains the monopoly of the English language paper – *The Straits Times*. The significance of using English as the official working language in a multicultural society has further implications (see also earlier discussion on language in Chinese capitalism). English is the compulsory first language and also the medium of education from primary school to pre-university level. According to Tan (2003), the

systematic use of English leads to further interaction between cultural and social processes. The interrelation between the development and use of English in Singapore, and the dimensions of hegemony makes the implanting of policy accessible. In the context of the political economy of Singapore, English is the official language of communication in socio-economic relations and historical processes.

The three most important parapolitical institutions (known locally as grassroots organisations) are the Community Centres (CCs), the Citizens' Consultative Committees (CCCs) and the Residents' Committees (RCs). The selection and appointment of the members in these organisations are all under the scrutiny and control of the Prime Minister's office. This suggests the nature of grassroots organisation in Singapore. As a consequence of this, opposition parties are not able to advance their policies as they do not have adequate access to intermediary agencies (Hill and Lian, 1995). Thus, public bureaucracy as well as so-called community organisations, are almost indistinguishable from the PAP (Rodan, 1993). Indeed,

> "Singapore's political system is best interpreted as a form of corporatism. This contention sees a relationship of economic and political subordination between the state (as representative of national interest) and particular social groups (notably labour). To achieve this subordination, society is organised into limited number of interest groups in the forms of associations, societies and unions whose support of state objectives is ensured by close government control."
>
> (Perry *et al*, 1997, p. 66)

Although not all interests in Singapore are under the control of the state, commercial organisations being linked to the PAP and even the military are common and widespread. As Singapore is a predominantly Chinese society in a region surrounded by non-Chinese, the central components of PAP ideology are multiracialism,

pragmatism and meritocracy. These are also connected to the deeper origins of Singapore's controlled democracy (Hill and Lian, 1995; Austin, 2009). Compulsory military service for all 18 year old males was introduced not only to strengthen military security but also to encourage ethnic mixing (Huxley, 2000). However, it is not difficult to understand that the political behaviour in Singapore has its roots in Confucian ethics (see chapter 3 and 6 for further discussion), where the population plays a submissive role in favour of economic prosperity. This reflects how a developmental state adapts according to local culture for economic progress. Again, this highlights the presence of the military in part of the nation building process and demonstrates the close relationship between the military and government.

The Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) expanded their capabilities exponentially in the late 1960s; the national budget spent on the armed forces grew four times in less than ten years (Huxley, 2000). During the 1990s, fundamental reorganisation and significant re-equipment under the modernisation programme enabled Singapore's army to develop its combined arms capabilities while simultaneously establishing a rapid deployment force, despite the shortage of National Service Force (NSF) personnel. However, it must be remembered that Singapore's army remains a citizen force, dependent for its personnel on essentially acquiescent conscripts and reservists. This reflects the 'closeness' between the society and military. What happens in the military automatically has immediate and even lasting effects on the citizens. According to Huxley (2000), the SAF's non-military activities have been minimal compared with most of other Southeast Asian armed forces. Instead,

> "The SAF has not exercised a civic action role apart from assisting small-scale community projects such as bridge-building and road-repairs during the late 1960s and early 1970s."

> (Huxley, 2000, p. 229)

The political and administrative role of the military is also part of the nation-building process. The boundaries between military, politics and administration are blurred as many senior civil servants and military personnel also take up positions in parliament (Perry *et al*, 1997; Huxley, 2000). Furthermore, in 1981, The Ministry of Defence introduced a 'dual-career scheme' under which middle or high-ranking SAF officers (or sometimes known as SAF Scholars) could be seconded to positions in the civil service or statutory boards, and would ultimately have the opportunity to be part of the elite Administrative Service on a permanent basis (Singapore Business, 1990). The widening administrative role of SAF officers potentially has significant implications, but the transfer of senior SAF officers to political positions has received greater publicity. The first officer to make such a move was BG Lee Hsien Loong, the then prime minister's elder son. A second senior officer, BG George Yeo, left his military appointment, and joined Lee in government to be Minister of State (Finance and Foreign Affairs). Subsequently, many 'dual career' scholars were also working for the GLCs. Clearly, the relationship between the military and corporate environment becomes more connected and entwined. In chapter 6, I argue that in the establishment of such a military-dominated regime, the societal embeddedness of such individuals and groups contributes in significant ways to the shaping of corporate culture.

Societal embeddedness is strengthened by the Shared Values project, launched by the government in 1991 and it consists of four components:

> "placing society above the self, upholding the family as the basic building block of society, resolving major issues through consensus instead of contention, and stressing racial and religious tolerance and harmony."

> (Ministry of Information, Communication and the Arts, 2002, p. 13)

Clammer (1993) argues that the project is to prevent social change or trying to direct it in manageable directions. He lists six reasons to support his argument. First, Singapore's opposition to foreign values and lifestyles ignores the importance of this same exposure in forming Singapore's culture and economic competitiveness. Second, traditional Asian ideas of morality idealises the extent to which Asian moral values were ever part of Singapore society. It overlooks the fact that most Singaporeans are descendants of immigrants who were fleeing morality, duty and society in search of greater freedom and prosperity (Clammer, 1993). Third, the loss of indigenous culture seems to be viewed as a matter of choice rather than as a consequence of the massive social and economic changes experienced. Fourth, values in society are an uncomfortable mix of description and prescription. If they are a description of already existing values, it may be questioned whether they require further evaluation and adaptation. If they are still to be accepted, then details such as family values are subjective due to the widespread practices of the middle classes – relying on poorly paid foreign domestic servants for care giving. Fifth, the balance between individual rights and state authority has been an uneasy task leaving a wide margin of discretion to the state at the expense of the individual. Lastly, while claiming not to favour any one community over another, the shared values in a multi-racial country do draw disproportionately on Confucian ideas (cited in Perry *et al*, 1997, p. 78). I agree that these points give an insight into the political system that the government has been creating. However, the Western model of democracy was not meant to be implemented identically. As a developmental state, any model that was to be introduced into the society was adjusted to suit the local population and government. This seems to be a main feature throughout the political and economic organisation of Singapore. The mixing of values has contributed to a peculiarly Singaporean value

system supportive of corporatist government. This combination leaves a definitive mark on corporate culture (further discussed in chapters 6 and 7). The societal embeddedness of Singaporeans does have an effect on 'the way things are done' at the workplace.

Jones *et al* (1995) describe three distinctive features of a form of 'questionable democracy' emerging from Singapore after the 1991 elections. First, Singapore seems to be a non-neutral state. In contrast to the Western emphasis on freedom of choice, it is argued that East Asian society accepts extensive government intervention and control in order to promote the national interest. The national interest is typically presented as a blend of development aspirations and the selective restoration of traditional values. Elections are a source of evaluation and feedback on the state's vision, and a test or proof of any opposition's willingness to break away from the national consensus. However, in the case of Singapore, it is seen as acceptable to deny opposition electorates certain public services (Rodan, 2004). In a liberal understanding, democracy succeeds when elections legitimise the rule of the serving elite. In the Singapore context, for example, it has been noted that electoral support is not about how well the opposition performs but rather how united the nation is behind the PAP leadership and the party's claim to be a people's movement. Second, in a Western democracy, the legal system provides a medium through which individuals or the judiciary can interrogate the activities of the state. In the questionable or adapted democracy, the legal system leaves little space for critical or creative interrogation by the legal profession or individuals. Rather it seeks to provide a precisely defined code of conduct, specifying the duties of citizen. Lastly, a managed civil society is an extraordinary feature in the existence of formal democratic procedures without politics. Instead of rising education and affluence encouraging the formation of

political parties, interest groups and critical debate, the activities of any emerging group are channelled into state-managed arenas (see also Perry *et al*, 1997; George, 2000; Chuan, 2007). This results in a managerial solution to any latent opposition, avoiding alternatives to authoritarian intimidation. The acceptance by interest groups of such capacity reflects the tendency for groups to form around specialised interests, without connection to a larger political agenda, which is a product of the inherited constraints on political activity and an uncritical education system. The inter-connectedness of these processes can affect the way in which economic activities are carried out, and shape corporate culture.

4.5   Labour, Population and Development

This section examines population and development since independence. The key aim is to illustrate the role of the state in population control in Singapore between 1965 and 1990. It highlights another distinct role of the state in the development of Singapore, and how it has left an effect on the labour force.

There was no real population policy until after World War Two. Due to the colony being a free port of trade, the main form of population growth was inward migration. When Singapore became part of the Federation of Malaysia in 1963 and then gained full independence in 1965, there was clear concern for the government to implement population policy to control the high fertility rate. This was in order to prepare the country for more capital-intensive industry where the quality of a skilled labour force was vitally important to enable the nation to join the technology highway and to stay competitive in an increasingly global market. Physical space (land) is scarce in Singapore and land intensive industry such as agriculture and farming were slowly

phased out to make way for industrial parks, commercial districts and public housing development. The relationship between population and development is always important and particularly so for Singapore. When it broke from Malaysia in 1965 it was clear to the country's leaders that the future prosperity of the society would be greatly reliant on human capital.

> "In Singapore, however, the concerns are not only with the quantity of the labour force vis á vis the demands of export-based economies but with its 'quality' as the economic structure changes in its specific labour needs."

(Drakakis-Smith *et al*, 1993, p. 162)

For other than its geographical location and its trading legacy around the port, the country had few natural resources to exploit. This process highlights the inter-connectedness between the people and government. The institutional structure and processes configure how the society functions. One of the key aims of this thesis is to investigate if this societal embeddedness permeates through and becomes part of the corporate culture.

The period between 1957 and 1975 was not only a period of economic prosperity, it was also a period in which the government of Singapore introduced a package of population policies aimed at reducing population growth. After Singapore gained independence, there was a highly distinctive period in population development between 1965 and 1983 when fertility rates declined to below replacement level. This was due to the implementation of a national family planning policy that included financial and other incentives to control fertility rates (Drakakis-Smith *et al*, 1993). This package of policies was intended to curb over-population at a time when the

country was economically developing at a rapid pace. There were real fears within government that being such a small island, Singapore would face major long-term problems if its population was not controlled as it gained prosperity. The rate of economic growth at this time was extraordinary with per capita GDP increasing by more than 550% between 1969 and 1990 (Caulfield, 1996, p. 331). However, the success of these policies meant that since 1983, the government has become concerned not so much with over-population but with a declining population, including a lack of young people and a large ageing population. As a consequence, government policy again changed dramatically and policies were implemented to increase population growth especially in selected areas of the population (Perry et al, 1997). This illustrates the level of concern and influence the state has over-population control;

> "Concern about the quantity and quality of its labour force has been one of the major factors in bringing about a reversal of Singapore's population policy from anti-natal to pro-natal. In addition, the new policy has sought to enhance the quality of the workforce by offering incentives to encourage larger families amongst the more educated Singaporeans. After five years, responses have been muted, partly because of a growing sense of resentment amongst the younger adults towards interference in what are regarded as family decisions."

> (Drakakis-Smith et al, 1993, p. 152)

Consequently, the decline in fertility which took place at that time cannot easily be seen as simply a result of socio-economic developments and it would seem that a more likely answer is that it was a combination of both prosperity issues and governmental population policies. Indeed, the

> "island's population policies were designed with specific development targets. The initial anti-natal 'stop at two' policy which was in place from the early 1970s to 1987 intended to reduce population so that Singapore could 'catch up' with development. In contrast, the New Population Policy (NPP) or 'have

122

three or more if you can afford it' attempts to reverse the demographic transition Singapore experienced some 15 years ago in order to create a larger skilled workforce to help the country remain economically competitive in the next millennium".

(Teo and Yeoh, 1999, p. 80)

The gross reproduction rate fell to below replacement level by 1975 well ahead of the target set by the government in 1980. Consequently, the government in 1983 took steps to reverse this fertility trend and introduced a new set of population policies which have been called the New Population Policies (NPP). The policies put in place in the mid 1980s continue to provide the framework for Singapore's population policies to this day. Also, a sharp recession in the mid 1980's was a major factor in shifting Singapore's population policy:

"... in a bid to rejuvenate the economy and embark on a 'second industrial revolution', population control was harnessed to the restructuring strategy."

(Teo and Yeoh, 1999, p. 83)

However, the first phase, which lasted between 1984 and 1987 called the Eugenic Phase was highly controversial in that it was very clearly based on a concern to encourage the well educated women to have more children whilst women not so well educated were encouraged to keep their fertility levels down. As Teo and Yeoh wrote:

"... the Prime Minister openly supported the controversial argument that a child's intelligence is inherited and is related to the mother's intelligence. He lamented the decline in the fertility of most educated women and worse still, the increase in the number of unmarried female graduates."

(Teo and Yeoh, 1999, p. 83)

It is not entirely clear from the literature how controversial such views were in Singapore itself. This is not an unusual situation as controversies are often not

publicised in Singapore. Most of the controversial comment seems to come from outside the society, whereas within Singapore, the public media seems to be in agreement that those with the best education ought to be encouraged to have more children. Many of the measures introduced within this so-called eugenic phase remain in place and have only been slightly reformed over the past 20 years. This reflects an important characteristic of the government; such interventionist policies have a broad implication for the general public. The 'way things are done here' is very formulaic and laid out by the government. It is met with very little resistance especially as the government argues that its measures are for the benefit of the economy. Consequently, this helps create an overall atmosphere of conformity which also transfers to the business environment in Singapore.

What Lee Kuan Yew the (then) prime minister was reflecting was the government's desire to build on its economic success which placed such reliance on a highly skilled and educated labour force (see Olds, 2007). These were skills which could not be easily provided by migrant labour. According to Huang and Yeoh (1996) foreign workers are seen as a "stop-gap" measure and tend to be repatriated in periods of recession, such as in 1984/5 when 200 000 foreign workers were sent home. Rather,

> "In the long-term, the state aims to restructure the economy to manage without such a high dependence on immigrant workers, both skilled and un-skilled. The preferred long-term strategy has been to increase automation, train a skilled local work force, as well as to encourage Singapore women to enter the labour force and remain after marriage and the arrival of children."

> (Huang and Yeoh, 1996, p. 484)

It was with these ideas that the NPP was created. This time the focus was to stimulate a controlled growth in fertility, especially amongst those considered to be the most

able in the society. The consequence of these policies has been to (i) increase the birth rate, from 16.7 per 1000 population in 1987 to 20.0 per 1000 in 1988; (ii) the gross reproduction rate has increased from 0.789 in 1987 to 0.954 in 1988; (iii) legal abortions have declined from 55.3 per cent of live births in 1985 to 38.1 per cent in 1988 (Singh *et al*, 1991). However, despite these changes, the NPP has not been very effective in encouraging its targeted educated women group to increase their fertility. As one writer noted:

> "Overall it is questionable whether the pro-marriage and birth incentive programs will have the substantial impact the government desires. The SDU[6] program, for example, spent $294,400 during its first year but achieved only two marriages. For over a score of years, the government preached the gospel of small families and the message was accepted, particularly by the well-educated. There are no signs that educated Singaporeans are likely to quickly reverse present low fertility patterns. Singapore has become an affluent and strongly consumer-oriented society, and the incentives for multiple childbearing still do not fully compensate for an educated woman's lost employment, income, and promotion opportunities. Educated women are likely to increase rather than decrease their full-time participation in the work force."
>
> (Palen, 1986, p. 12)

This point has also been made by Teo and Yeoh (1999) that with Singapore's economic success and development in which women have many opportunities to develop highly paid and successful careers, the opportunity costs of child bearing have greatly increased for women. Many more women opt for their careers rather than marriage and children. This was confirmed by their empirical research which involved interviews with a cross sample of nearly 200 women. What they learnt from their research was that while many women were in agreement with the NPP, they themselves, especially the most educated were not going to change their own

---

[6] Social Development Unit (SDU) was formed in 1984 to promote marriages among graduate singles, while Social Development Services (SDS) was set up in 1985 to promote marriages among non-graduate singles.

behaviour as a result. When it came to the NPP, many of the women interviewed were supportive of the government – they thought that Singapore needed more young people, needed more educated and skilled workers, were concerned that the Chinese population was falling behind the Malay and Indian population. Nevertheless, the women themselves would not change and were committed to small families with two children being the ideal size. Hence, Teo and Yeoh (1999) concluded that,

"… the NPP must come to terms with the contradictions generated by broader socio-economic dynamics tending towards a desire for small-sized families on the one hand, and nationalist goals to augment the labour force on the other."

(ibid, p. 93)

Despite this evidence, the government continues to 'fine tune' the NPP. As Graham noted:

".… rather, the new policies are designed to fine-tune fertility in an attempt to ensure that it stabilises at replacement level."

(Graham, 1995, pp. 229 – 230)

Nevertheless, in its desire to see an increase in fertility to bring the population back up to replacement level it has relaxed some of its more explicit eugenic elements:

"Since 1986, Singapore's population policy has changed from 'two is enough' to 'three children or more if you can afford it' Instead of restricting the policy to a selective group (as in 1984/5), the policy was applied to the entire population".

(Singh *et al*, 1991, p. 75)

It was evident that the NPP had some considerable impact on peoples' lives in Singapore and as Lee *et al* (1991, p. 72) has noted, "the government is confident that it will be able to increase fertility."

From the discussion of the population and development of Singapore, it is apparent that the island city-state is of special interest to demographers since it has moved from high fertility in the 1960s to below replacement levels in the 1980s. As it has done so, its population policies have shifted from a birth reduction to pronatalism. Also, Singapore with virtually no natural resources has transformed itself in the last 25 years from poverty to a newly industrialised economy. Singapore today boasts a GNP higher than the other "Asian Tigers" of Hong Kong, South Korea and Taiwan. Singapore's GNP is higher than that of Spain or Italy and is over twice that of Greece (Palen, 1990). In the World Development Report 2010, the Gross National Income per capita 2008 of Singapore was US$35 760, compared to US$34 240 in Italy, US$28 650 in Greece, and US$31 960 in Spain. In its path towards economic success and development,

"Singapore is an example of a country that has gone well beyond voluntary family planning to reach its population objectives."

(Singh *et al*, 1988, p. 401)

It was often questioned whether the government was too hasty in trying to achieve results in an area where the process may have taken a longer period than its rapid economic success. Nonetheless, it was clear that the state played a very active role in population control. This discussion provided another dimension to the influence of the state on the everyday lives of the people. The government's strategy was very direct

and targeted. This set a very strong sense of state involvement or even control over all aspects of the development process. Ultimately, according to Teo (2010), despite the limited effects in reversing demographic trends, family policies devised by the state give ideological and practical content to both state and society, creating an aura of how 'we should do things' here.

The PAP's relative autonomy from both capital and labour was to prove especially important. Having remained committed to private sector-led industrialisation, Singapore's policy makers looked to the experiences of Hong Kong and Taiwan, both of which by mid 1960s had successfully embarked on export-oriented industrialisation (EOI) programs. Subsequently, such policies concentrated on labour costs. The government marshalled the government affiliated National Trades Union Congress (NTUC) in support of its social and economic policies (Perry *et al*, 1997). The *Employment Act 1968* and *Industrial Relations Act 1969* were introduced, reducing wages, increasing working hours, severely curtailing union bargaining powers and the capacity for industrial action (Rodan, 2001). In 1972, government intervention in the labour market was further institutionalised with the establishment of the National Wages Council (NWC). The government set about trying to generate the social, political and economic preconditions for industrial investment in export production, conditioning Singapore's comparative advantage. The state's effort to foster higher value-added production extended to the social and political domain. The country's two largest trade unions, the Singapore Industrial Labour Organisation (SILO) and the Pioneer Industries Employees' Union (PIEU), were separated into nine industry-based unions, reducing any potential for organised labour to affect any restructuring process (Rodan, 2001). Indeed,

"Essentially government control was extended over the trade unions so that they became an extension of government itself, rather than an independent body representing workers' interests."

(Davidson and Drakakis-Smith, 1997, p. 77)

Coe and Kelly (2002) argued that discursive strategies were an important component of local labour control regimes. The authors used the aftermath of the Asian 1997 crisis to analyse how the retrenchment and retraining of workers is seen as providing other opportunities for upgrading of skills. This strategy is not only seen as a plan to maintain national security but also to sustain the country's comparative advantage in the region during and after a financial crisis. This sort of involvement by the state is echoed throughout the development path of Singapore. This is also crucial to our understanding of corporate culture in Singapore. The way in which the society is 'managed' does affect the way in which 'things are done' in the corporate environment.

The Singaporean workforce is another factor of production for the Singapore economy. So,

"keeping the labour force consistent with contemporary requirements is a key role played by governmental authorities, whether through suppressing wages and collective representation, encouraging selective immigration, or providing for educational and training opportunities in new area of economic activity."

(Coe and Kelly, 2002, p. 341)

The process is not a straightforward one. It consists of more than just introducing a new programme. It is a far more complex process, changing the mindset of the workforce and keeping the social calm during a crisis. Nonetheless, Singapore's

labour control regime gives the possibility of a possible universal solution encased in a small state (Coe and Kelly, 2002; Chuan, 2009). The key component in the success of such a labour control regime is the complex and high level of state involvement in shaping the economy.

Coe and Kelly (2002) argued that the government of Singapore did not attempt to control labour exclusively through economic or legal means. The influence by the government was also through cultural or discursive power, that is, creation of popular understandings and social language. This was also echoed by other observers of Singapore such as George (2000), Austin (2009) and Chuan (2009) who argued that the government of Singapore sought to shape the attitudes and cultural characteristics of the labour force by encouraging the population to work harder and 'obey' the signposts to be polite, not litter and be active in national activities. All these are indirect actions to shape the attitude of the local population. Barnett (2001) draws on Michel Foucault's ideas on power, culture and governmentality to argue that the culture-and-government approach is a powerful relationship. Coe and Kelly (2002) draws on this to suggest that this culture-and-government approach can be a perfect fit in the Singapore workforce control context. Barnett (2001) argued that

> "culture is understood as a set of practices or technologies for the transformation of individuals into subjects capable of governing themselves."

(ibid, p.14)

He goes on to suggest that it is possible

> "to track specific formations of the cultural and the extension of distinctively cultural forms of government into the fabric of modern social life, as new fields are reconfigured as cultural in order to be subjected to particular forms of social management."

(ibid, p. 14)

130

Singaporean-based academic, Kong (2000) argues that the government of Singapore developed cultural policies to connect economic and socio-cultural agendas. Essentially, cultural polices were implemented to complement the economic development, which was further supported by use of national ideology and nation building language. This cultural discourse was what Coe and Kelly (2002) suggested in their argument that not only was the state of Singapore directly controlling the local workforce but also influencing the population towards a productive and self-sacrificial mindset. They highlighted

> "the discursive construction of Singaporean workers' subject positions in relation to the 'economy' (both Singaporean and global) and the necessary characteristics of the worker in the new economy."

(Coe and Kelly, 2002, p. 347)

Also, in the Singaporean context, the influence from the government diffuses into other non-government and government-related agencies. This is extremely important in the discussion on corporate culture as it sometimes difficult to separate state and private control. According to Teo (2010), with the production of Singaporean society, family choices provide logic and boundaries that guide the average Singaporean's life choices. In fact,

> "even though pro-marriage and pro-natal policies have not reversed demographic trends, they have shaped norms and ideals around marriage, childbearing and care-giving practices."

(Teo, 2010, p. 351)

This draws attention to the regularity and predictability of relationships between the state, individuals and their families. This institutionalised dimension of the state has

influenced people's everyday lives, taken-for-granted norms, and their deep beliefs (Teo, 2010). I believe this continues to the shape the way in which they 'perform' they roles and practices in the workplace, and shape the corporate culture.

Jonas (1996) argued that the local labour control regime not only encapsulated a place-specific institutional agreement to regulate the local labour market, it also included an embedded set of mechanisms based on the local history and culture, interacting and co-ordinating to form unique and distinctive local institutions and social relations. This will form a local community identity. This was what Coe and Kelly's (2002) case study tried to illuminate. The sophisticated framework of conceptualising the structural and institutional relations set the foundation of a place-specific labour control regime. The same relations then went on further to nurture the regime in its own distinctive manner. The government of Singapore used different ways to influence the main actors in the economy, shaping the attitudes of the workforce in order to implement certain changes. In another words, it was a complex and sophisticated way of coaxing the population to accept and obey new changes. The government's ability to generate and disseminate powerful labour discourses through the media and public statements was central in controlling local labour. It must be emphasised that the combination of a direct strategy and discursive strategies in controlling the workforce is potent. The implications of such strategies set the precedence for the active manner in influencing the people, and the effects of such tactics are reflected in the corporate culture.

4.6   Conclusion: People and Government in the Developmental Process

In the development process, it is clear that the Singaporean experience is a very people-centred one.

> "Over the last three decades the Singaporean government has appeared to give increasing attention to people as human resources rather than as recipients of the benefits of development. Of course, the government wishes to improve the quality of life of its citizens but sees this largely as a natural consequence of the collective efforts of 'Team Singapore', *guided by its leaders*. [emphasis added]"
>
> (Davidson and Drakakis-Smith, 1997, p. 75)

From the discussion on workforce and population control, what the government of Singapore is actually trying to achieve in managing human resources is to ensure capitalist (re)production by improving the quality of the workforce and the fundamental reason behind this is to guarantee economic growth. The mechanisms used can be direct (seen in population control) and indirect (seen in local workforce control) to create a conducive environment for economic growth and stability. This is the main aim in the development process for Singapore. This process, reflects the central role of the government in the course of development and economic growth – even to the extent of creating systematic processes for the workforce to follow (see Chuan, 2009). The close relationship between political, administrative and military personnel is also a significant one. This distinctive development and nation building creates a unique style of 'management' unseen in the west. According to Schein (1996), the leaders of Singapore's EDB created and nurtured a corporate culture that was instrumental in developing and implementing Singapore's economic development strategies. The EDB is a governmental agency, yet it acts like an entrepreneurial company. Although the EDB's leaders differ in their managerial styles and orientations, individually and collectively they have created and maintained a set of

cultural imperatives in developing Singapore into a global city providing comprehensive business capacities for high-value-added global industries (Schein, 2006). The transference of such societal characteristics should flow into the corporate place as discussed in chapter 2 and, in later chapters, I provide evidence of how they are reflected in the corporate workplace. Corporate culture is not just about the corporation itself, it is also concerned with the individuals that work in that corporation; the characteristics of the workforce also influence the corporate culture. In chapter 2, the essence of corporate culture was discussed and it was argued that there is a need to examine further the embeddedness of the social and cultural aspects of the economy to have a fuller picture of corporate culture. The shaping of corporate culture is not only influenced by the top management but also the way in which the people are governed in the country. The discussion in this chapter has reflected on the extent of the role of government in the shaping of the Singaporean economy, family, and the rites and rituals of the political process. This has illustrated the nature of the political climate in which the corporate environment is functioning and how the people are 'managed' for economic growth and political stability. The way in which the people are influenced outside the corporate workplace is clear and in later chapters, I discuss how the corporate culture reflects these embedded social characteristics, political and institutional structures.

In chapter 3, I examined the kind of business system and practices that are dominant in the regional and local economy – Chinese capitalism. Features such as business groups, corporate networks and Asian values are all part of the processes in the (re)making of Chinese capitalism. The complexities of globalisation have challenged the traditional way of Chinese business organisations and structures. In addition to the

intra-regional networks, issues such as nation building and language are also part of the impact and processes of Chinese capitalism. In the next part of this thesis, I explore how these political, social and cultural characteristics leave an imprint on corporate culture, and I provide evidence in later chapters of how these features affect the 'way things are done' at the corporate workplace. The corporate workplace becomes a site for the cultural (re)production of the people who are engaged in such a specific mode of economic practice.

Part Two

Findings: Patterns and Flows

Chapter 5

Research Design

5.1   Introduction

The construction of corporate culture, as we have seen, is a multilayered process. Individuals and the organisation can create a certain distinct corporate culture that is both directly and indirectly influenced by traits of the society, political economy, cultural practices and the economic system. This chapter describes how these factors that shape corporate culture have been explored through the research process. The fieldwork consisted of formal interviews, informal conversations, participant observations and examinations of popular literature (government and commercial websites, company reports, newspapers, biographies of prominent political and business leaders). These methods provided insights into the factors contributing to the formation of corporate culture. The discussion in this chapter will examine how, and why, the data were collected, and the significance they serve.

This chapter therefore addresses the research design of the project. Section 5.2 discusses the methods used in this project, and also the limitations of such methods. In 5.3, the positionality of the researcher is examined. It provides reflections on 'insider-outsider' issues, and considers the benefits, difficulties, and limitations of my particular position as a Singaporean-Chinese who is residing and writing this thesis in the UK. Matters regarding the researcher's positionality continued to develop as the

analysis proceeded in the UK. Section 5.4 reviews the three companies that were examined and the key participants in the fieldwork. In section 5.5, I draw some comparisons among the three companies. The context is set by the details of the companies and this provides further background understanding to the analysis in the empirical discussion (chapters 6 and 7). Besides introducing some of the key interviewees, further details on the significance of their roles in the company, as well as contribution to this project, will be provided (see Appendices D, E and F). Through the discussion, I provide insights into the process of the fieldwork, and lay out the foundations for a better understanding of the empirical discussion in chapters 6 and 7.

5.2   Methods

Qualitative studies are typically small-scale intensive pieces of research in which everyday life experienced by all sorts of people and communities, at different times and in different places, are explored (Robson, 2002). The importance of discourse and meaning is thus central to qualitative approaches, and data may be obtained via a variety of methods. These range from participant observation, focus-group discussions, group interviews, semi-structured interviews, discourse analysis of both spoken and of written texts, the use of case studies, and the use of visual media such as photographs and film (Bryman, 1992). In this research, the qualitative techniques used included participant observations, focus groups, and semi-structured interviews. The main emphasis was on participant observation and semi-structured interviews. Furthermore, in order to enhance the validity and reflexivity of the research, I used triangulation procedures. I also reflected on my own 'situated knowledge' in respect of the participants' views and actions. The use of official data, commercial reports,

autobiographies of political and corporate leaders, newspapers and company reports were also used to provide a fuller picture of the research.

Qualitative methods are often criticised because of an association with subjectivity and the belief that interpreting information in a qualitative manner is open to many potential pitfalls, interpretations and simple misunderstandings between researcher and the audience (see Bryman, 1992; Robson, 2002). Analysis can thus be value laden and hence is juxtaposed negatively to the supposedly objective virtues of quantification. Thus, reflection should be constantly reviewed to ensure clarity. The position of the researcher, their perceptions, experiences, expectations and prejudices are deemed as important, and play a part in the research process (Creswell, 1994). Such studies allow the complexities and 'differences' of the worlds under scrutiny to be explored, analysed and represented. In this research project, the data which emerged from the interviews and informal conversations are made relevant by the way the researcher is able to decipher the different levels of meanings. Issues on positionality during the data collection process are addressed in a later part of this chapter.

5.2.1 Formal Interviews: Let's talk about 'how we do things here'

In this research project, 60 interviews were conducted in total over a period of six months in Singapore. The first round of interviews involved eight people holding managerial positions in SMEs, MNCs and GLCs. They subsequently became gatekeepers, and formed part of the networks for me to gain further access to office premises and company events for more interviews and observations. The position of the individuals within the company was crucial in reflecting the 'way things are done

here'; positions ranged from junior clerks, officers, assistant managers, senior managers to 'elites' such as deputy directors and directors of companies (see Oinas, 1999; Faulconbridge *et al*, 2008). This provided a more thorough representation of the company, and how the experiences of these individuals were reflected in the organisation (see Welch *et al.*, 2002; Berry, 2002). Their different educational and socio-cultural background also reflected the wider Singaporean society.

All interviewees were offered the option to view the interview questions beforehand (Appendix A), and also given a consent form to complete (Appendix B). The questions were structured to enable the interviewees to express what they think corporate culture is, and how it can be created, influenced or shaped. Confidentiality of the interviewees and the information gathered were carefully treated. Consent forms (see Appendix B and C) were used and all the names were changed to protect the identity and confidentiality of the interviewees and participants. The questions (see Appendix A) were set as a guideline to a semi-structured interview. However, depending on the situation and progress of the interview, there was flexibility in the interview approach to allow creativity and further development of the interviews (Robson, 2002), and questions were sometimes changed to probe further into some specific questions to examine how the individual's personal and professional experience influenced their perspective on corporate culture and how 'we do things around here'. This practice was helpful in the initial fieldwork, and was followed through in the second part of the fieldwork. Also, there was variety in the location where the interviews took place. Interviews were conducted in office environments as well as more informal environments such as country clubs and cafes. This often facilitated warmer and relaxed responses from the participants.

The interviews also provided the opportunity to explore the various backgrounds (education, work experience and on-going training) of the individuals and how they were continuing to develop themselves. This provided invaluable information on how their previous and present connections affected their perception of corporate culture, and how they felt corporate culture can be shaped. The embeddedness of their own individual characteristics can affect how they carry out business practices (Granovetter, 1985), and this is further discussed in chapters 6 and 7 in how their professional, social and cultural characteristics played a significant role in the (re)production of corporate culture.

5.2.2 Informal Interviews: Let's talk about 'how we really do things here'

Where an interview takes place, the location can make a difference and there are certain limits to formalised interviews no matter how informal the environment is (see Valentine, 2005). Talking to business participants in their own 'territory' allows them to be more 'official'. However, when the interviews take place in a more informal environment such as cafes or restaurants, more anecdotal accounts arise from the conversations with the participant. The participants were able to be more relaxed in a neutral environment, indulge in 'small talk', and went on to expand expansion on some of the interview questions. The individual's stories reflect a perspective of the process of 'how things are done here'. However, as a group, various accounts gathered from formal and informal conversations reveal more complex issues, which were not addressed in public – reflecting 'how things are really done here'. The key informants very often divulged more information after the formal interviews (and recordings) to offer more detailed information. The trust that was established during the course of the

fieldwork enabled the informal discussions to proffer further insights into how things are really 'done around here' (Mishler, 1991; Fontana and Frey, 2000). These informal interviews were collected over the course of the fieldwork and some informants were able to provide more details than others. Bias was taken into consideration due to the positions of these informants. Collectively, the information that emerged from these conversations gave a real sense of how things 'should be done', and how it is 'really done here'. This is reflected by the Deputy Director of a multinational company (MNC) involved in this project:

> "Actually, different people can tell you different things, right? But I think they can only tell you what they know. And true enough, everyone only know so much because of the kind of position they are in... So, the picture can be kind of confusing. But I think the team leaders and the managers give quite an ok picture."
>
> (Arthur, Deputy Director, MNC)

The limitations of formal interviews were compensated by the informal interviews and conversations. The details that were left out (un)intentionally by the participants were often followed up in later informal conversations. This reflects how the corporate workplace, with its different cultural context, and the complex codes of behaviour between the interviewees and researcher, can affect the dynamics of the interviews (see Townsend 1995; Skelton 2001; Robson, 2002). The collective response of the participants gave an additional depth to the individuals' responses, and were both highly enriching as the fieldwork progressed. The 'way things are done here' described by the interviewees was made more prominent throughout the data collection process, and put under more scrutiny when it came to observing the everyday practices at the companies and also at some of the major corporate events.

The informal conversations gave a fuller perspective on the formal interviews and together with the observations, they revealed how 'things are really done here'.

5.2.3 Participant observation: Witnessing 'how things are done here'

Ethnographic research requires a certain period of time spent in the field to allow the researcher to observe, investigate, and examine the participants and organisation (see Geertz, 1975; Gupta, 1995; Strati, 2000). The participant observation conducted for this thesis involved engagement in the way 'things are done here' at the three companies; small-medium sized enterprise (SME), a multinational company (MNC) and a government-linked company (GLC). These three companies are introduced in more detail in a later part of this chapter. They were chosen to ensure observation of corporate culture in action across the mainstream corporate workplaces in Singapore. As discussed in Chapter 4, the government plays a vital role in the development of Singapore; large numbers of GLCs are involved in the growth of the economy, indicating their significance in the corporate arena. Singapore is also an international hub for many companies, and there are numerous MNCs situated in the country. The presence of such MNCs contributes to the 'way things are done' in the corporate workplace. The SME sector also plays a significant role in the economic development of Singapore, and represents the style of the national economic organisation. The inter-connectedness of individuals' personal background and work experience can reflect how societal embeddedness affects corporate practices in the various sectors; providing a picture of how corporate culture can be shaped and influenced in Singapore. Although it is not possible to observe all the activities the participants engaged in, a fuller picture is represented by the various activities and engagement with the participating companies from the GLC, MNC and SME sectors. The

engagement took the form of observing daily activities and routines. Participant observation also took place with members at various levels of responsibility within the companies. The six months spent with the companies were substantial enough to have a feel of 'how things are done' there. Interaction occurred at office premises, company formal events and social events. The combination of both formal and informal events gave insights into how they bring their individual personality into the corporate workplace.

The observation stage was divided into two periods. The first period was one month and the second period was five months. The initial observation period was an introduction into the company environment to establish key contacts. The interval between the two periods was about five months. During the periods of participant observation, the majority of the time was spent in offices, observing and interacting with the people. Being part of the formal meetings and social gatherings also gave a fuller experience of their corporate lives. The major company events were highlights of the fieldwork, and really showcased corporate culture in action. During the course of the fieldwork, notes were kept on the interaction and the observation of the daily activities within the corporate environment. Personal reflection was then noted at the end of the day (see Parr, 2001; Cook, 2005; Kesby *et al*, 2005). These notes and personal reflections of the conversations, observations, interactions, and reflections became main issues and themes that are discussed in further detail in chapters 6 and 7. Some of the interviews towards the end of the fieldwork were more detailed, revealing the progress of the researcher's critical reflection over time. The next section reflects on positionality concerns faced by the researcher throughout the whole research

process. The complexities of the researcher as an insider and outsider, on site and off site, can offer further insights into the research process.

5.3   Positionality: 'Excuse me, are you a local or a banana?'

In this section, I reflect on my positionality as a researcher. Some of the issues that emerged throughout the research process involve insider-outsider complexities, difficulties and limitations of the researcher's particular position. I can be considered an 'insider' as a Singaporean-Chinese who was born and grew up in Singapore, able to speak Singlish but also treated as an 'outsider' as I reside outside Singapore, and was conducting the research at an overseas University.

Whilst on site, I often had to assumed different roles according to different situations. At various periods of the fieldwork, I was sometimes the 'PhD student', 'independent observer', 'new intern' or 'new employee'. The roles were very fluid and adaptable to ensure the participants were at ease with me. It was important to reflect upon such roles as the reactions of the participants illustrate some of the attitudes and practices that influence corporate culture. Although it is argued that an 'insider' and 'outside' dichotomy does not exist (Herod, 1999), positionality issues give diversity and richness to the same event through various interpretations and representations (Ley and Mountz, 2001). The researcher draws on personal and academic interpretations of events to relay to readers the experience of the participants. It may be argued that the fluidity of the roles may have caused inconsistencies in the research process. However, I suggest that it is this fluidity that illustrates the different interpretations and representations of the participants, reflecting the multi-layered complexity of how the Singaporean society constructs and shapes corporate culture.

Positionality of researchers has been previously explored in relation to ethnicity, race, class, gender, age and personal background (see Rose, 1997; Skelton, 2001; Robson, 2002). The power-relation and notion of 'self' have been significant and reflected in fieldwork practices to explore the dynamics between researcher and the participants. In my experience, care must also be given to ensure clearer representation of the participants, and not of the researcher. Throughout this research project, deliberate effort was made to reflect upon the researcher's positionality so as not to misrepresent the 'voice' of the participants. However, the perspective of the researcher had been challenging, and the fluidity of it required extra effort to clarify the purposes of the fieldwork activities. Nonetheless, through the process of justifying and (re)situating the researcher, it gave the project a more critical perspective.

As a fellow Singaporean, my ability to understand and interact as a 'local' categorised me, by many participants as an 'insider'. This facilitated the research process as I could interact, socialise with the participants and immerse in the field without being treated like a foreigner. The 'fitting in' with the 'locals' was invaluable as the participant observation moved from the office environment to more informal places such as open-air food courts, KTV lounges, indoor coffee houses, hotel restaurants and participants' family gatherings. This gave precious opportunities to observe how the participants behave at corporate and social events. The ability to decipher codes of conduct and language during such activities was also helpful so as not to misread, over analyse and/ or under analyse the data available.

Being a Singaporean-Chinese, I was sometimes categorised as an 'outsider' by some participants. This was not anticipated, and only surfaced when interacting with non-Singaporean-Chinese. The focus on self-reflexivity and positionality translates into the insider and outsider border (Mohammed, 2001). Not only was being Singaporean an insider/ outsider, being a Singaporean-Chinese also created these dual-positionalities. The recognition of such differences may lead to the practice of hyphenating pre-given identities, so that multiple positions can be regarded not in terms of flows and patterns of articulations and/or interconnectedness, but also as separate elements that can be added onto the multiple truths (see Mohammed, 2001). I had to constantly review whose truth it is, ensure data were not over-exaggerated, and participants' voices were appropriately represented. However, for the benefit of non-Singaporean readers, pre-knowledge of the Singapore society cannot be assumed and additional information is provided throughout the thesis. This process illuminated some of the 'taken-for-granted' aspects of how 'things are done here'.

As a researcher conducting this piece of fieldwork at a non-Singaporean University, I was also seen as an 'outsider'. Given the complexity of the researcher's and participants' identities, and the dynamism of the research field, truth claims can be grounded only in a real recognition of the limitations of vision and knowledge and the existence of multiple truths (Mohammad, 2001). In chapter 6 and 7, I examine the various themes that emerged from the fieldwork to reflect the numerous components that create and shape corporate culture in Singapore. Some of the participants' comments indicate that they saw me as an 'outsider'. Some were quick to share their experience, but some were reluctant. Some of them regarded a research degree as something obscure, and some of them assumed that I was doing a PhD to get away

from the pressure of a working (corporate) life. This was not surprising as most of the people who work there had been in similar jobs from the start of their working life. Many of them had misconceptions about life outside Singapore. They often stereotyped Westerners as having a more relaxed working attitude (often referring to the advert from Fosters beer), where they take Friday afternoons off to drink by the beach or at the bar. These comments usually came from the locally educated staff. However, some of the overseas graduates also joked about such stereotypes. Nonetheless, those who had experienced life overseas, either for education or business, were more willing to participate in the research. Those who have had a chance to live for a period of time in the UK, were the most enthusiastic in their reactions and conversations.

The discussion to follow reflects upon the researcher's personal background and positionality in this research. This provides further details on the Singaporean society, and also gives a clearer picture of the dynamics between the researcher, participants, and the research process. Conversations involving national service were common between most of the participants and myself. Singaporean men often use the topic of national service as an ice-breaker as it is a shared experience. Women are sometimes excluded from the conversations but they sometimes do join in, relating to the experiences of their male siblings or male partners. Most of the junior male employees would have a prolonged 'national service conversation' with the researcher. That seemed to be the common ground to start a conversation. Also, male employees who were physically-abled and combat-fit, were still liable to complete 13 years of reservist service. The Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) would 'buy out' the reservist and it was known that the higher paid the employee was, there was a lesser chance of

being recalled. I spoke to a few bank directors and they divulged that the SAF cannot afford to recall them for reservist service due to costs of reimbursing their salaries. One cannot simply dismiss the significance of national service in a male Singaporean's life. The impact of national service is a dominant one and can be reflected in how they behave in the corporate environment as we see in chapter 6.

Some of the conversations that followed after finding out about the secondary schools and junior colleges attended by the interviewees were also interesting. There was always a connection from being part of the same alumni or affiliated alumni. There were similar shared activities and events that were common to the different schools. For example, all the missionary schools have affiliated 'brother-and-sister-linked' schools (such as Raffles Girls and Raffles Institution, Catholic High School and St. Nicholas Girls School) and coming from a similar school background helped bridge the gap in the conversations. On the whole, those who come from a similar background or have a similar experience shared a lot more information with the researcher and amongst themselves. This can also be seen in terms of the area where participants reside at, the type of schools attended, army experience, University experience, the way we speak and class background. This is further elaborated in chapter 7. Language was also a mechanism for making that closer link with the participants. The senior members of staff were usually very co-operative, less suspicious and more approachable. Initially, most of them were wary that I might be there to take notes on their work performance and the junior staff and were really curious about my presence in the office. To ease their fears, we conversed in Singlish stressing that I was an independent researcher and was not related to any of the

departments in the company. I also used Singlish during informal conversations to ease any possible uneasy formalities. This is further discussed in chapters 6 and 7.

The area of one's residence and personal education background reflect a distinct status and class in Singaporean society. In general, 85% of Singaporeans live in HDB (Housing Development Board) flats. This is the equivalent of council flats in the UK. Due to the scarcity of land, owning a piece of land is very expensive and thus living in a landed property was seen as prestigious. Key informants and participants such as Arthur, Cecilia, James, Alphonsus, Jennifer, Kah Wee and Smitha live in houses (see Appendices D, E and F for more details of participants). Even if one did not live in a house, the area which they reside in can also be regarded as prestigious. Alan, Emily, Karen, Eugene and Chris live in serviced condominiums, in a prestigious area along River Valley Road. In recent years, there has been a dramatic emergence of a new middle class and a new bourgeoisie; creating new alliances and elite groups (Robison and Goodman, 1996). This has a definite impact on how people interact with one another and who they want to associate themselves with at work. Also, belonging to the same group can sometimes accelerate working relationships.

The secondary schooling system in Singapore is separated into four different streams: the Gifted, Special, Express and Normal. The Gifted Stream catered to those in the top 1% of the cohort in that year. The Special Stream was for the next top 5% and the Express stream is made up with the majority of the cohort. The Normal Stream group was those at the bottom of the league and was channelled towards vocational training. Those in the Gifted, Special and Express would take 4 years to complete their GCE 'O' levels. The Gifted Stream and Special Stream students had a more rigorous

programme and usually top the 'elite tables' in both academic and sport achievements. So, by identifying the school one went to, it was easy to know what kind of educational background one had. Arthur and Chiping were from the Special Stream, and Elmas was from the Express Stream. What is the importance of this? In Singapore, the elite tables were often a mark of performance level and people feel the pressure to mix with those who were from similar background. So, Arthur's friends were all from a similar background whilst Elmas' friends were from a similar background to him. By belonging to a similar stream to Arthur and Chiping, one was allowed into their 'fellowship'. Issues regarding positionality are fascinating and extensive. In the following section, the companies and main characters in the fieldwork are introduced.

5.4   The Companies and Key Characters

In this section, I review the three companies examined in the fieldwork. I provide background of the companies and set the context for the empirical chapters to follow. I also introduce some of the key interviewees and explain the significance of their roles in the company as well as their contribution to this project (see Appendix D for full details). The GLC and MNC sections provide a fuller picture of the environment in which the research took place. In the SME section, details are provided and some comparisons are drawn between the three different companies. I decided to conduct my case studies on one company from each of these sectors; SMEs, GLCs, MNCs. This was intended to capture a general sense of the corporate culture of Singapore; examining such three different companies within different industries will reflect the porous nature and greater complexity of the characteristics that shape corporate culture. As discussed in Chapter 4, the government plays a vital role in the

development of Singapore, and has a dominant presence in the local economy. GLCs are part of the government's commercial and investment branch, and collectively form the influential Temasek Holdings (Bando, 1990; Perry *et al*, 1997; Tan, 2008). The GLCs are known for their highly structured and 'orderly' style of 'doing things'. Moreover, GLCs are very significant in the economic growth of Singapore, and 'the way they do things' does affect the kind of corporate culture that is created in Singapore. At the same time, Singapore is also an international hub for many private companies, and there are numerous MNCs situated in the country, hence, forming a major part of the local economy. MNCs have been known to reflect characteristics of the *laissez-faire* economy, and have a more flexible and adaptable style of 'doing things' (see Dicken, 2003; Coe *et al*, 2007). The presence of the MNCs contributes to the 'way things are done' in the Singapore corporate workplace. The SME sector also plays a significant role in the economic development of Singapore. The SMEs form a vibrant and significant part of the economy that has been overlooked by, or unsuitable for GLCs and MNCs. SMEs are often regarded as having conservative and traditional way of 'doing things' (Rivera, 2003; Hamilton, 2004). The three companies are chosen as they are symbolic representations of their sectors. Collectively, these companies are a reasonable representation of the 'typical' Singaporean economy, given the limited resources of this project. All the companies chosen are leading organisations in their own sectors – 'shapers and movers' in their own field. In addition, these three companies are chosen for the purpose of this research because of their difference in shareholders and ownership; giving a broader representation of the corporate culture in Singapore. In this research, corporate culture at SME, GLC and MNC are seen as a complex condensation of social relationships, of varying density and variety; they take a material form in the built environment of corporate

workplaces, residential areas, communication and transport routes. Such relationships come together in specific time-space combinations to produce 'unique places' (see Massey, 1995; Hudson, 2001). Furthermore, the range of professions and people who have participated also contribute to the complexity of this 'unique place', and provide a qualitative perspective to the quantitative dimension of Hofstede's cultural dimensions. Hence, within limits, these three companies do provide a rational reflection of the corporate culture in Singapore as a whole rather than the corporate culture of individual firms. The inter-connectedness of personal and professional life of the workers (in all three companies) reflects the way in which the societal embeddedness can affect corporate practices in the various sectors provide a fuller picture of how corporate culture can be shaped and influenced in Singapore.

The fieldwork of this research project started in December 2005 with the first set of interviews conducted in Singapore. The key informants and gatekeepers were established, and this led to further interviews and participant observations from June 2006 to October 2006. I conducted 60 interviews and spent three weeks with each of the three companies. I also attended several corporate functions and events during the fieldwork period. The sectors from which the companies were chosen to conduct my observation reflect the diversity of the Singaporean corporate environment. The observations were all set up through key informants and gatekeepers whom I initially interviewed. The interviewees came from SMEs, GLCs and MNCs located in Singapore. Many of the participants have varied experiences working in at least two different types of sectors. They are also able to cross compare their own experiences in different companies they have worked in before and it is interesting to note how they make some connections throughout the interviews. Most of the interviews are

semi-structured and many significant conversations took place during informal sessions. The observations took place in various departments of the companies. The corporate events were also extremely informative in providing rich insights to the research project.

All the names of the companies and individuals have been changed. If the names of the individuals were in Chinese, I have changed it to another Chinese name. This is the same for Christian names. I also use what they are known by others, and how their colleagues address them, such as Tim, Tan Eng Choo or Mr Peng. The specific details of the individuals have also been slightly altered to ensure confidentiality of the participants. In what follows, I set the context for each of the individual companies and the key characters of this research.

The Government-Linked Company (GLC): Merlion Limited

Background

Government-linked companies, or GLCs as they are often referred to, are considered a category of companies unique to Singapore. These are firms in which Temasek Holdings, the investment holding arm of the Singapore government, possesses a substantial stake. Since Singapore's independence in the mid-1960s, the GLCs have played a strategic and important role in the economic development of Singapore (Perry *et al*, 1997). In 2008, some of the largest public companies listed in Singapore's stock exchange were GLCs, such as Singapore Airlines Limited and Singapore Telecommunications Limited (www.gov.sg). Although, the Singapore government is the majority shareholder in both companies, the financial performance of these GLCs is benchmarked against the best in their respective industries internationally (see Perry *et al*, 1997; Singh *et al*, 2001).

Most of the large indigenous enterprises are government controlled. In total, the government has an ownership interest in over 500 companies, comprising over half the 500 largest businesses in Singapore. The total assets of the 15 largest statutory boards and the 47 largest GLCS amounted to $208.4 billion in 2008, equivalent to two-thirds of Singapore-owned business assets (www.gov.sg). The prime objective of this investment in joint ventures was to develop strategic industries.

Merlion Limited is a GLC based in the west side of Singapore. It is located in an industrial district and is accessible via public transport (subway and bus). Their core business is engineering products and solutions. Their clients include local and

international organisations (military, government and multinational companies). The influence of military experience comes across strongly in this company.

The company is housed in a six-storey fenced building. The entrance to the building is not elaborate. There are no landscaped features, unlike other major privatised corporate organizations. There are ample car parking lots and there are marked spaces (in red) for the President and Vice-President of the company, located nearer to the building entrance. This reflects the hierarchy of the organisation. There are 500 employees in this company. The security is tighter than most private commercial organizations and all visitors have to surrender their identity card[7] (ID) in exchange for a visitor's pass.

Observations

The observation and interviews took place on the ground floor (Human Resource department) and fourth floor (Marketing and Sales department). The reason for focusing on these two departments was accessibility. The engineering and information technology department are high securitised departments and gaining access was too difficult. The common waiting area in the Human Resource (HR) department is simply decorated. The walls are yellow and the chairs are red. This gives the room a

---

[7]Identity cards (ID) are issued to every Singaporean when they reach the age of 12. The card contains a photograph, both English and ethnic name (Chinese, Indian or Malay). There is also a signature and thumbprint record on the card. The ID number (commonly known as NRIC number) is also the registration number for all official purposes, such as memberships of the national library, community centre and any e-government business activities. The NRIC number is required to borrow books, extend exit permits (from national service), book sports facilities, registration for lucky draws, bank registrations. The ID card is seen as a necessity for the every life of a Singaporean. However, the ID card is not a travel document and all Singaporeans need a passport to leave and re-enter the country.

bright and welcoming atmosphere. The sofas are very comfortable. However, the corridor is very busy and it is not a common area for the employees to stop and chat. Most of the conversations took place in the official meeting area, which is comprised of a large round table outside four smaller offices. By the meeting area, there are fax and photocopying machines. This meeting area is always busy. Many discussions about work happen here. If there is a need for private conversations, it takes place in the offices. The common language used in the office is Singlish[8]. Although serious conversations are carried out in English, the accent is still very much Singlish. It is quite a noisy office and people do banter loudly across the room. In the higher management level, normal conversations are in English. However, the more casual the conversations are, the 'less accurate' the English becomes and the conversations are carried out in either Mandarin or Singlish. An example of a serious conversation is

> "Eileen, I'm not sure what's the status for this contract. Can you please follow it up? Once you have the confirmation, please direct it to the floor upstairs and cc to me too? Oh, can you please let Yao Ling in on what you are doing? It is time for her to learn the ropes too. She's not so sure of such big orders. Processing the authorization of big orders will be her next task. Thanks."

> (Ling, Team Manager, GLC)

An example of a less serious conversation in Singlish is

> "Hey, didn't I tell you so? Damn *shiok* (Malay: satisfying) right? *Wah lau eh* (Hokkien: Oh my Lord), everytime I go there, they always give me special. I *sythink* (Singlish: think) they really know how to make us glue them. Hey, let's go there again for *makan* (Malay: to eat). This time, bigger group, better deal. More fun too, *re nau re nau lor* (Mandarin: the more the merrier).

> (Ling, Team Manager, GLC)

---

[8] Singlish is a local mix of languages of English, various Chinese dialects and Malay. It is spoken with a distinctive local accent.

The designated common area is a contested space. It was originally designed for the casual interaction between the HR staff and other non-HR staff. It is a common area for non-HR staff to have light conversation with the HR staff. The HR staff also use it amongst themselves for casual conversation. The area is also a waiting area for interviewees (potential employees) whilst waiting for their interviews. The area is designed to be cosy and relaxed and meant to be used for initiating conversation and depending on the level of confidentiality, the conversations will continue either in the offices, food courts or after office hour venues. The area becomes a common place where the staff exchange casual conversations. However, when the conversation becomes more serious, the volume of the conversation is dimmed and the tone gets more serious. This will make other casual conversations feel out of place and they either move the serious conversation to the offices or continue the conversation and exclude others from the common area. The usual practice is to move the conversation to the enclosed offices.

"... *aiya, bie zhai ze li suo ze me duo, deng yi xia zhai ju xu...*" (Mandarin: let's continue this conversation later and elsewhere.)

(non-HR staff to a HR staff)

"Ok, that's something we need to go through, let's go to the office, ok?"

(HR staff to another HR staff)

It also depends on the position of those having the serious conversations. A high ranking member of staff is more likely to have the influence to transform the common area to an exclusive and private area.

"Ling, sorry to interrupt this conversation, we need to get this done soon. Can you come to my office? Thanks."

(Elaine, HR Director, GLC)

This section has highlighted some key characteristics of the GLC company, Merlion. Further details of the main people at Merlion involved in this research can be found in Appendix D. The next section will provide key features of the MNC, Quantum Solutions.

The Multinational Corporation: Quantum Solutions

Background

Quantum Solutions Singapore is an American-based multinational company (MNC). It employs about 300 employees in Singapore. The core business is providing global communication solutions to other companies. Their clients include government-linked companies and other MNCs. It has three offices in Singapore. The Asia-Pacific regional headquarters is in a business park, near a residential estate. The other two offices are frontline offices located in the city centre.

There are eight buildings in this business park and the company I was conducting my observation on occupied two floors of one building. The location of the park is not secluded and is easily accessible via public transport; buses and MRT (Mass Rapid Transport). In close proximity of the business park, there are residential estates, shops and food courts. The security in the business park is average and there is no need for identification/ inspection to enter the park. However, I needed my identity card to gain access to the buildings, unless I carried a company staff card. There are three shops in the park; post office, coffee house and a food court. There are 10 stalls in the food court; six Chinese, one Indian (Halal) and three Malay (Halal). Smoking is not permitted in the building. Most Caucasians will sit in the outdoor area of the coffee house whilst the locals will sit indoors. The Caucasians who work in the park seldom eat in the food court as they prefer the coffee house, where sandwiches and gourmet coffee are served. The prices of food and beverages in the coffee house are relatively more expensive than those in the food court. The locals who patronise the coffee house are either seen as 'Westernised' or having a higher disposable income.

The entrance to the park is rather ostentatious, with elaborate water fountain features and landscaped gardens, which I later found out were for *feng shui* purposes. Being located in the Western side of Singapore, which sounds like (x*i tian*, meaning going to heaven in Mandarin, i.e. facing closure in business), the water features gives the business fluidity (steady cash flow), reflect the bad elements and 'protect' the companies there from going downhill. This is common in a Chinese business environment. The architects take *feng shui* seriously when they design buildings, especially buildings for banks. There are no valet parking services but I did see a few top managers being dropped off by company chauffeurs. Many of the staff rely on public transport and there is also a constant flow of taxis going in and out of the park. Staff are allowed taxi fare when they complete a certain number of over-time hours. In this company, I found out that they are allowed one taxi voucher after four hours of over-time. Some staff say there is no general trend and the junior workers need not stay later than their senior peers. They stress that this is not a Japanese or Chinese company and there is no pressure for that sort of practice. However, there are few instances when a junior worker stays just a little later until the senior manager leaves the office premises.

Observations

The office furnishing is 'minimalist' - the colour of the walls in the meeting rooms is plain ivory and there are no decorations on the walls. Along the passageways, there are company advertisements, logo, awards (such as IT solutions awards and ISO 9002) hanging on the walls. There are 10 clocks showing different time zones (London, New York, Paris, Hong Kong, Beijing, Tokyo, Bombay, Auckland, and Sydney). All the desks and chairs are standardised and all the meeting rooms have

glass walls and glass doors. The HR area has different cubicles but the finance office has an open floor space. The payroll office has a glass wall and door. There is total 'transparency' in the office environment. This 'transparency' supposedly makes the employees more productive as they feel that they are being watched all the time by their subordinates, peers and upper management. The employees have mixed opinions on this. Some say it is good and they feel that they are part of the larger company but some say it is an intrusion of their private working space.

The common areas include a pantry, photocopy space, lounge and waiting area. The pantry has a microwave, fridge, kettle, tea and coffee machines, snack bar, water dispenser. Not many people utilise this pantry as nearly all of them have their own thermal mug by their desk. Also, this area is very open to the fax/ photocopy and HR area. This is not a common area for social interaction. The fax/ photocopy machine area has one fax machine and two photocopiers. People rush in and out of the area to collect or photocopy materials. Conversations are kept to a minimum in this area. The lounge is situated between HR and Finance office. There are two sofas, a newspaper rack and a coffee table here. Employees usually pick up the newspaper and read it by their desks and return the newspapers to the area. Although the furnishing is very upmarket and well decorated, not many people sit down and have a conversation here. The waiting area by the main reception is mainly for guests waiting to be greeted by the accounts manager and HR managers or waiting for the meeting rooms to be ready.

The language used at Quantum can be seen as more 'Western'. Singlish is often used but American jargon is often injected into conversations amongst the staff. For example,

"Aiyo, today so *siong* (Hokkien: hectic)! Hey, never mind, let's hang out at Murphy's later."

(Chris, Regional HR Manager, MNC)

"Hey, that's totally awesome. But are you sure they got that right? You better check through them again."

(Elmas, Accounts Manager, MNC)

The designated common areas are not fully utilised for its intended purpose. Instead of being a common social area, workers usually use off-site premises for social interaction. Any casual conversations and interaction are kept to a minimum within the office premises. There is a sort of 'lead by example' situation here as due to the 'transparency' of the area, the employees usually notice the frequency of coffee breaks of their senior management before going for their own coffee breaks. Although it is a MNC, the working hours and coffee breaks frequency are very conservative. The dress code in the office is very smart but there is a clear distinction between the team leaders and the team workers. The team leaders put more effort in to their appearance. Also, those who dress up more seem to have worked in overseas branches before. This distinction is also reflected in where they socialise and how they interact with other employees. The more conservative locals (often team workers) spend less on their outfit and will hang out in the local food court. The team leaders spend more on their outfit and will make an effort to socialise in trendier places. This may be due to their higher disposable income but the network they have access to will be different from the team workers. There are three meeting rooms in the HR department. Two of them are for one to one meetings and the third room has an oblong table that has maximum capacity of 12 people. There is another large glass walled meeting room in the Finance office with a large white board and data projector. There is an oblong

table in the middle of the room and the maximum capacity of the room is 18 people.

Overall, the meeting rooms have an impressive outlook and sense of sophistication.

Further details of the key characters at Quantum Solutions can be found in Appendix

E.

Small-Medium Size Enterprise: Dayton Multimedia

Background

Dayton Multimedia is a locally owned SME in the advertising industry. Dayton Multimedia is one of the leading advertising companies in Singapore and provides advertisement services for both the public and private sector. They have their own in-house multimedia suites, graphics, IT and creative teams. Their advertisements are featured in local newspapers, magazines, radio and television. They also provide advertising consultancy services to other local and overseas companies. Dayton Multimedia is also involved in partnerships with overseas companies in Asia and USA. One of the key features of Dayton Multimedia is their status as a leader in advertising in Singapore. Many overseas companies consult them regarding censorship and freedom of speech in the region. This can sometimes be difficult in the media industry, especially in Singapore and Asia. Another key product this company offers is events management. They have been involved in many events for marketing purposes. Their clients include government departments, local private companies, international financial firms, MNCs and GLCs.

The main office is located in an industrial estate of Jurong (eastern zone of Singapore). The office, spread over two storeys of the 20 storey building, consists of three multimedia suites where the studios for shoots and editing are located. There are also two large graphics rooms where state-of-art computers are situated. The meeting room looks like a large lounge with comfortable chairs, coffee table, advertising magazines and indoor plants. This is where formal and informal meetings take place between the employees. The company employs about 50 people, mainly graphic

designers, camera crew and project managers. Appendix F provides more detail of the key individuals who contributed to this research process.

Observations

The atmosphere at Dayton Multimedia is one of fun and plenty of unconventional meeting places. The employees have regular formal and informal meetings in the common room before they go back to their studios or offices. There was not much of a hierarchy; everyone was called by their first name and even affectionate 'nicknames' were given. The senior management did not have to 'dress up' and there was not an 'air' to their seniority. When the team meets, it looks and feels very relaxed. For example, Dayton Multimedia has a scheduled Monday Blues meeting where it was designated to give everyone a perk to start the week. At this meeting, each department take turns to bring snacks for everyone in the meeting 'lounge'. At this meeting, conversation topics can range from formal to informal; from talking about the movie they watched over the weekend to a bid strategy they have to make by the end of the week. For example,

> "Hey, guess what? That movie was too bloody for me. I am surprised that they got through the censorship board. But the theme was quite exciting. Very Hollywood. Did you go cinema then?"
>
> (Eugene, Senior Marketing Manager, SME)

> "By the way, I think we have to gauge the market better this time. The last time, I heard from Den that we lost out by only a small margin. I think we should rethink and reorg our bid. Better to do a smaller business than do no business at all. I think Wee will agree and let us pitch it lower this time. I speak to him later."
>
> (Eugene, Senior Marketing Manager, SME)

Thus, the interaction between the employees is less formal. There are the usual protocols to follow but it is done in a 'softer' manner. I did ask Lim Wei Yeow, the assistant director, on this informal style at work and his reply was;

> "Well, we want our staff to be creative. As you know, it is very stifling here (referring to Singaporean society) and we are in the forefront of advertising and we have to think outside our box. So, we want to create this relaxed but also serious working environment... must have good *chi* (Mandarin: energy) and can create good vibes for our work. Actually, I can tell you that we are doing pretty well."

> (Lim Wei Yeow, Assistant Director, SME)

The use of language and imagery are also an interesting one. Lim Wei Yeow feels that as a leading company in this field, he wants the company to have a modern touch without losing the local culture. This is illustrated in the following conversation between Lim Wei Yeow, the assistant director, and researcher.

Raye:	How important is the government's "Speak Mandarin" campaign?
Lim Wei Yeow:	Seriously, we don't have a choice but I can tell you that it is good that they made us do it. Just look at the youngsters, nowadays. They are very creative but they also lack discipline. Of course, being modern is good but *tai chong yang* (Mandarin: over idolising the west) is not ideal, I think.
Raye:	How does this *chong yang* aspect affect the corporate culture here?
Lim Wei Yeow:	Ha, that's a good question, you know. Let's not forget where we are and who our clients are. It is different when your clients are out of this pond. I think we are always trying to keep a balance here. Technology is good but we try to enhance the local culture. Not everything good is from there (referring to the West) anymore. Just look at China, *feng huang teng fei le* (Mandarin: the phoenix has risen from the ashes).

From the above excerpt of the conversation, it is clear that Lim Wei Yeow wants to be modernised, but also wants to maintain some of the local and traditional culture. The use of language, cultural references and imagery conjures a sense of 'rootedness' to a perceived Chinese value system. These themes are further explored in chapter 6 and 7.

5.5   GLCs, MNCs, SMEs: 'We are the same but we are also different'

'I tell you, actually, don't care if you work in GLC, MNC or SME, it's all the same in Singapore. But, we're also different. Confusing, right? That's my experience, believe it or not.'
(Arthur, Deputy Director, MNC)

The discussion on Merlion Limited, Quantum Solutions and Dayton Multimedia has described many similarities and differences amongst them. They are different sized corporations with different shareholders and ownership. Many of the stereotypes can be found in these three companies according to their background and history; GLC having dominant government influences, MNC having more 'liberal' working attitudes and SME having more 'localised' work ethics. However, there are also contradictions and this reflects the changing attitudes and practices of the society; changing the way people behave in their social and corporate environment. In following chapters, some of paradoxes are discussed to reveal how political economy, societal characteristics and Chinese capitalism can shape corporate culture.

According to Berg and Kreiner (1990), the architecture of the corporate buildings and the interior design has a significant impact on behaviour in terms of interaction, communication and performance of work tasks. This can be reflected in some of the

observations discussed earlier. For example, the GLC's premise is one of high-security, and appears very hierarchical. The protocols of seniority are strictly followed and are almost military-like. At the MNC, the architecture is typical of a high-financed and top 100 listed company. The SME's office premises have an informal setting. This may fit into the stereotypical expectations of such companies in the various sectors. However, the attitudes and behaviours of the workers within the premises may not necessarily fit stereotypical expectations; the GLC being very structured, the MNC as a very liberal and 'un-local' working environment and the SME being a local company that has very conservative and traditional practices. From the empirical data, it is interesting that not all the stereotypes are being played out at the workplace. In the case of the SME, the informal meeting area is meant to break down barriers between different ranks but some of the conversation shows that it can sometimes still be rather hierarchical (see also Appendix F).

In all the participating companies, language, attitudes, behaviours and use of cultural references reflect the wider 'people issues'. The corporate culture that the individuals try to explain, or demonstrate, highlights that it is not only the implicit and explicit 'rules' that guide and shape their own behaviour; it is also a vehicle through which they consciously try to influence the behaviour of one another. The activities such as company social events, formal and informal meetings do take place across the three companies. However, it is the way these activities are carried out that makes them distinctive from one another. The rituals and ceremonies that the employees go through have similar objectives but are carried out in a slightly different manner according to the nature of the company they work in. However, these practices are symbolic and reflect the wider embedded characteristics of the society, and are not

just carried out according to scripts consciously enacted in response to the company's requirements. These are further discussed in chapters 6 and 7.

5.6   Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed the research methodology underpinning this thesis. I reflected on the complexities of my positionality in this research project. Being both an insider and outsider sometimes put me in a complicated situation. Being an insider has given me invaluable access to information and also being able to interpret those data (as an insider) is extremely vital. However, I also have had to grapple with being categorised as an outsider (or some of the interviewees label as 'banana' or 'potato'). The outsider 'persona' allowed me to be move between different groups of interviewees, to be part of 'them', to gather a wider perspective and interpretation of their perception of corporate culture. Furthermore, being able to interpret data as both outsider and insider had been vital to the 'criticalness' of this research. I explored some of the diversity and complexity of 'the workspace' and attempt to sense of them in a 'Westernized' but yet Asian corporate environment. The positionality issue continued even when I was off site and proceeded to the analysing of data. In this chapter, I reflected on the kind of data I used and why I chose them for the purpose of this research. The use of official information and company policies were compared with the actions and activities at the corporate place. The exploration on use of language, education system and national service in this chapter adds to the context and background of the following empirical chapters, especially on how the boundaries between formal and informal business practices could be blurred. I also examined and reflected on the background of the companies and individuals (see Appendices D, E and F), providing the rationales behind selecting this group of companies, that I

observed and interviewed. The nature of the companies and the experience of the interviewees are crucial in the construction of corporate culture. The discussion here reveals how the complexities of societal characteristics, embedded in the individuals can begin to influence their actions in the workplace. In the following chapters, I demonstrate how the combination of political economy, Chinese capitalism and societal characteristics can have an impact on corporate culture.

Chapter 6

Corporate Culture: National Service, Nation Building and Language

"Corporate culture is generally viewed as a set of social conventions embracing behavioural norms, standards, customs, and the 'rules of the game' underlying social interactions within the firm."

(Schoenberger, 1997, p. 116)

6.1   Introduction

This chapter illustrates some features of the Singapore nation building process, and the use of language and reflects upon their significance in the shaping of corporate culture. In chapter 4, I examined the development of Singapore with particular focus on the state, economy and labour. In doing so, I identified significant characteristics in the nation building process. The government plays a pivotal role in shaping the progress of the developmental state. Mechanisms such as enforcing main languages to be used in media, education system, public campaigns to promote a multi-religion society and national service (civil defence force, police, navy, army and air force) all play a part in forming the institutional structures of the society. These characteristics may be common to the Southeast Asian region but are particularly important in the shaping of Singapore society. Following the discussion on corporate culture in Chapter 2, I argue that these societal characteristics have a significant influence on

business practices and corporate culture, but have been underrepresented in the present literature on corporate culture. In this chapter, I provide evidence of how political and institutional processes can shape ongoing business and social relations. I also demonstrate how the nation building process is embedded in network relations, thus shaping corporate culture. In section 7.2, I discuss the impact of the national service experience at the corporate workplace. National service has a definite and major effect on the Singapore societal culture. This has its effects, in varying intensity, in the shaping of corporate culture. The impact of a dominant one party rule, regimental labour regime, national education system, national service and class formation all contribute to the social relations embedded in society and space, and hence, influences the corporate culture of Singapore. There may be resistance but the overall trend is one of conformity. How does this relate to the corporate culture? The people are 'fashioned' in this particular framework, and characteristics of this structure flows into the workplaces, affecting corporate culture. In section 7.3, I discuss how the use of language at the workplace can affect the formation of corporate culture. The combination of transnationals and local professionals create a distinctive style of 'corporate speak' at the workplace and this helps shape the corporate culture. Using extracts from my interviews and observation at company social and official functions, I show how some of the embedded societal practices have been transported into the corporate workplace and in the process, influence and shape corporate culture.

6.2   Corporate Culture: Nation Building and National Service[9]

As already discussed under the *Enlistment Act of 1970*, all male Singapore citizens and permanent residents become liable for National Service on reaching the age of

---

[9] Singapore Armed Forces (Navy, Army, Air Force), Police or Civil Defence

16.5, and are required to serve 2 or 2.5 years of full-time service, followed by up to 40 days of reservist annually until the age of 35, or age of 40 if they are commissioned officers. Singapore stands out within Southeast Asia for the size of its defence budget, the technological sophistication of its armed forces and its model of military mobilisation (Huxley, 2000). It is a very small country with a relatively substantial defence budget. Huxley (2000) analysed the significance of national service in Singapore and how this process provided strategic defence provision as well as strategic doctrine for the country. The creation of a credible military presence, the strengthening of civil-military relations between the military and non-government sectors serves as a strategy to engage the serving civilian officers with political roles (see discussion in chapter 4).

Using evidence from my fieldwork, I illustrate how national service has become not only a national defence operation but also a 'way of life' in the daily routines of a Singaporean. The national service experience has a major influence on men as they are the main participants in national service. National service also affects the friendship and family ties of the national servicemen. The 'way-of-life' and 'how things are done here' are all affected by some aspects of the national service process. This can be witnessed in the corporate place at various levels, including administrative, marketing, technical, sales and senior management. In the discussion to follow, I review the 'lingering effect' of national service at the corporate workplace, and how it has influenced the corporate culture.

The building of team spirit in the same way as nation building can also be seen in the workplace. After completing the compulsory full time national service, all combat-fit

males are required to complete a cycle of reservist service, usually twice a year. Many of the team leaders in this company are still eligible for reservist service. They do not have monetary rewards but the 'voluntarism' spirit keeps them engaged in the reservist service. Here is an example of it.

> "Actually, I quite like it. Bring back good memories and get away from work!.. Luckily my team very good. We support each other. Men got reservist. Women got maternity!... If you want team work, people are committed and it can be done... I think it also depends on what you do. Sometimes, it is a really waste of time. I think we are lucky to be in the vocation that we both learned new things. Some of my friends were in sentry box all the time! *Come on, if the government decided on it, we might as well give it out full support. Why bother with trying to avoid it? Do our best. This is our country, right?* [emphasis added]"
>
> (Elmas, Accounts Manager, MNC)

Elmas was very enthusiastic about going back for reservist service. His eagerness was not an isolated case; many of his colleagues were exchanging stories of the reservist camps they had just attended. This 'reservist talk' was also a popular topic amongst male colleagues during lunchtime. The time spent away from the office had to be compensated in other ways as workload did not lighten because of reservist time. In the case of a team in the MNC, some people started to work from 8am and the team was there overnight, leaving the office after 11am the next day. One of the reasons for staying so late was the accounts needed to be closed before 12 noon the next day. The team leader was due to go back for reservist service and could only come in the previous night to help out and finish some work. In this instance, the reservist commitment became an activity which brought the team closer together. Also, it was a pursuit that the reservist personnel looked forward to as a complement to the 'way of life' in the corporate environment. Elmas goes on to say,

> "This is part of life here in Singapore. This is something special."

National service plays a major role in the process of shaping and forming corporate culture in this MNC. The positions of some top management were explicitly determined by their ranks in their second career[10]. However, this was not experienced to the same intensity in SMEs and GLCs. Some of the key projects of the GLC are linked to the military (national and international). Having the right connections facilitated the smooth progress of the project. So, having a higher rank in the armed forces gave the person a slight advantage when it came to climbing the corporate ladder. This was also due to the structure of the board of directors of GLC companies and the commercial investment branch of the government of Singapore – Temasek. In the quote below, Loraine explained the reaction of her husband (a commercial head-hunter) when he met her senior manager. Her husband's reaction was one of astonishment as in his opinion, a MNC would not employ someone like Loraine's senior manager at such a high level job. He thought it was due to the military rank that the senior manager had that got him the position.

> "Even my husband laughed when he met our number one! But as you know, it is for MINDEF (Ministry of Defence) accounts. We all know that but no need to say too loud. It is good for us too, right? More stability. Then, let those without ranks deal with other clients. No big deal. National security, cannot fight against that."
>
> (Loraine, Marketing Manager, GLC)

Loraine acknowledged the importance of having a rank in the army (reservist) for dealing with accounts from the Singapore Ministry of Defence. She also said that the Thai government officials would prefer to have at least a military ranked person in the team. The significance of a military post when it came to dealing with government

---

[10] It is common to refer to the role one plays in the military as a second career. After full time national service, a Singaporean man will continue to serve his battalion as a reservist. For the lower ranked individuals, it is a time to get acquainted with old friends and take a break from their day job. For the higher ranked individuals, it is often seen as a prestigious contribution to the country. Having a high rank in the army lends them social and 'workplace' status.

officials was quite interesting. The military position gave credibility and included an additional layer of trust to the team, giving them an advantage when it came to dealing with other government-linked or government organisations. The experience of being in the military at a senior level also provided the 'know how' for dealing with senior military clients. The following quote further illustrates the significance of how a senior military rank may influence the corporate 'way of doing things'.

> "In Singapore right, we all been through the same thing [referring to national service]. But you know right, if you have more experience with the big shots [higher ranking officials or military personnel], it sometimes help to get things done quicker... Maybe, not so much in our organisation but this is Singapore, of course things like that do help. More better than don't have, know what I mean?"
>
> (Tony, Deputy Director, MNC)

Mr Tony Leung was referring to how the male Singaporean workforce shared a common experience and how the familiarity of this can facilitate their business practices at the corporate environment. In the next quote, Mr Eugene Yeung, a senior marketing manager at a SME, talked about how the military experience had a direct impact on his working attitude and corporate culture at his workplace. This also reflects that the national service experience exists in both MNC and SME companies.

> "Definitely, the corporate culture of our company is very important. We have to make sure we keep it updated so that we can remain competitive. We stick together like good old army days... Oh yes, when we are dealing with the clients, especially those Thai ones, if they know you have some background, they like it as some of them also same background. More trusting and reliable most of the time."
>
> (Eugene, Senior Marketing Manager, SME)

National service is embedded in the societal culture of Singapore. Using data collected from my fieldwork, it is evident that the national service experience is fluid and flows

through to the corporate workplace and plays a part in shaping corporate culture. The national service men or reservist service men act as actors in which the army scenarios are (re)created in the corporate workplace. The following quote reflects this,

> "Well, those army days are over but you see, if you put a bunch of us together... at BBQs or in the office, we also behave like the good old army days. I guess those habits are hard to get rid of but it is good experience and we just get on with it. It also strengthens our teamwork in the office."

> (Dennis, Project Manager, MNC)

Also, regardless of the nationality or ethnicity of the employees, the influence of national service was conspicuous; traces of the national service 'effect' were also found in different non-Singaporeans. For example, in the following quote, Jonathan, an Australian working in an MNC as a manager, explains how the national service affects his work life.

> "This is rather interesting for us. I've heard lots about it but have absolutely no idea how 'stuck' these guys are to their own habits. Oh well, it's easier to play along but it doesn't really affect me outside the workplace. We joke about it sometime at work but that's about it... it can be quite funny when I try to be like them here. It's a great laugh. But hey, we do get things done much faster this way!"
> (Jonathan, Manager, MNC)

The experience of national service did help to extend and strengthen established relations between the male workforce and also some of the business partners, especially Thai or military clients. This is shown in the following examples from all three companies. Dennis, a project manager in the MNC was telling his team who should take the Thai clients out for a work evening. It shows that the 'army talk' and national experience is both appreciated, practiced and even 'promoted' by the workers

and their business partners. This facilitates the business relations and is one of the activities that shape corporate culture at the MNC.

> "Get Paul to go for this one this time round. You know what they are like. Paul can entertain them just like good old army days. Save us the trouble of wasting time."
>
> (Dennis, Project Manager, MNC)

In the following excerpt of a conversation with Lim Wei Yeow, assistant director of the SME company, he expresses his preference to work with men who have similar national service vocation as they 'understand each other better'. He gives examples of how having this particular external experience affects corporate culture in the SME company.

Raye: How does the military service experience affect the way you work?

Lim Wei Yeow: You see, sometimes it is easier. We get the message faster, saves time and saves money. You work it out. But sometimes, no choice but it have choice, I think the guys just get them done quicker as we understand each other's lingo.

Raye: How does this affect corporate culture at your company?

Lim Wei Yeow: Hmm, it is quite obvious. The way we socialise with the gang, doesn't matter if you are Malay, Indian or Chinese, the way we talk, the way we joke, the way we work, everything chop chop and double quick time, all these things. Of course, it helps to make things easier as all have pretty much the same experience. So, more teamwork, I feel.

At the GLC, many of the senior managers are SAF scholars and the following conversation with Jennifer, GLC senior marketing manager, exemplifies how the national service experience contributes to the way they 'do things' at the workplace.

Raye: Do you think national service affects your workplace?

Jennifer:	This is Singapore, even women also get affected if we don't have to do national service. You know what I mean?
Raye:	Yes, but can you elaborate a little more?
Jennifer:	I mean this is GLC. Let's face it. Who owns us? But even not that, this is Singapore, everywhere you go also same. We are so small anyway. Workplace, hawker centre, home, supermarket, the army talk here and there. *It is our culture. This is the way we are.* [emphasis added]
Raye:	Then, how does this affect corporate culture?
Jennifer:	As I said, it is everywhere. But I don't see it as a deliberate thing. It is something I don't even think about until you ask. Look at my team, the guys get things done faster, just like they are platoon mates. The ladies understand the lingo and style and we also get it done more quicker. I think it teaches all of us a sense of urgency, as John always say. Yeah, we work faster, don't waste time.

However, national service can also exclude women from the corporate field in the GLCs. Women who did not have a rank may be overlooked when it comes to holding a top position. Not serving national service can be seen as 'the other' and a subculture develops from being 'the other'. However, 'the other' can also indicate diversity in ethnicity, race and educational background as many factors influence the shaping of the corporate culture at the workplace. The experience of national service is significantly important in the case of the GLC and hence comes with consequences for the women. The following quote reflects how women can be 'disadvantaged' because of their exclusion from national service.

> "Sometimes it is like that but we just have to carry on. They think like big boys or even army boys. The attitude don't change very much and they think they can do things like army days. Anyway, things change but some things don't change."
>
> (Evelyn, Accounts Manager, GLC)

Evelyn was referring to an incident when a group of colleagues were having a break after a team meeting. She felt excluded from their conversation as they were speaking in an 'aggressive' and boisterous manner that she did not appreciate and made her feel uncomfortable. However, the following excerpt of an interview reflects how Susan, a senior manager at a MNC, uses her 'borrowed' experience of national service to the benefit of the company; she used stories told by her male relations and related them to her male colleagues.

Raye: Do you think national service affects corporate culture in this company?

Susan: Oh, you know the guys stick together but they also have issues too. So, that's how we can come in with a fresh mindset. It is good most of the time. They don't mind it as long as we still give them face. I can remember how my brother and ex-boyfriend talked about their NS days. So, I also know how to handle my teams. It is about how to find a win-win situation. I try to use their experience and bring out the best in them for our company.

The exclusion of women from national service adds another dimension to corporate culture. It exposes the different experiences of male and female workers in their personal development and how it can affect 'how things are done' in the corporate workplace. There were also not many Singaporean Malays in this company serving in the middle or upper management. Some of the reasons could be the lower number of Malay graduates in Singapore as well as the lack of Malays who were also officers in their national service period.

"You know, the big shots have crabs on their shoulders and we need them for show, especially when we are dealing with MINDEF accounts."

(Loraine, Marketing Manager, GLC)

The phrase 'crabs on the shoulders' refers to men who hold the ranks of Major and above in the armed forces. She was referring to some of her supervisors who were dealing with the Ministry of Defence (MINDEF) accounts and the senior manager was also a colonel or major in the national service. This helped to lubricate the business transactions. The trust had been established in such situations. The corporate culture is influenced by the national campaign of multi-ethnicity. However, integration was lacking within the corporate environment. The difference in language, societal and cultural practices made the corporate environment more diverse and more exciting. However, it also meant that there was a more diverse set of practices and how 'things are done here'.

The following illustrates how the 'effect' of national service was being (re)produced at the Annual GLC Day. At the Annual GLC Day, the speech delivered by the company President started as a general annual report. However, it was also targeted at various different groups in the 500 strong audience. He went through a collection of slides on the performance of the company for the past 12 months. He used the EVA (Economic Value Added) measure of economic value creation in his analysis of the company's performance. His speech was mainly to announce and celebrate the success and achievements of the company, and to introduce to the staff the strategic targets of the company in the future. He had a short and medium term plan and in order to achieve that, he asked for the support from all levels of his staff. The manner in which he delivered these messages was 'corporate' but punctuated with imagery from the national service scheme.

> "Hello, this information is not only for those in the *frontline* [emphasis added], ok? Those at the back, can you hear me? If not for your support, the sales people cannot function, the project leaders cannot function and my managers all cannot function. So, all of us here need to do our part, ok?... We all know

that it is not easy to *cheong sua* (Hokkien: charge through the battlefield) but we can all R & R (rest and relax) after that. [The audience laughs] The good thing is, we don't have to clean arms, even better. Ok, enough of joking around. Let's be serious here. "

(Mr Tan, President, GLC)

He sounded like an army colonel motivating his troops; all the way from the infantry men at the combat frontline to the specialists and support troops. The combination of Singlish and 'battlefield talk' also helped to get the message across more effectively, giving a sense of urgency. The majority of the audience were Singaporeans. In order to speak 'their language', it was probably more appropriate to deliver his message in Singlish. The impact of language used and influences on corporate culture is discussed in further details in later section of this chapter.

The theme of the company as an extension of the family was also prominent in his speech. This adds a personal connection and sense of ownership to 'the way they do things' at the workplace.

"Your future is my future. Company's future is your future. I am not doing this only for myself. Yes, for the company and if the company do well, you do well too."

(Mr Tan, President, GLC)

The notion of team-building was brought to another level here. The imagery of how an individual contributed to a team, and how the team adds on to the growth and achievements of the company was a common motivational discourse. The comparisons of work mates, fellow platoon mates and family members seem to be used in the same breath.

"Your profit equals my profit and this also equals to shareholders' profit. It is not what we give to *Ah Gong* (Hokkien: Grandfather). It is for us."

(Mr Tan, President, GLC)

183

The use of such metaphors made the workers feel that they have a personal connection with the company and how the company was their own family unit or military unit. This style of motivational speak has a direct impact on corporate culture. The following quote goes on to complete the imagery in his speech.

> "Thank you again for your contributions. Let's have a look at the figures and state of our company. This is after all our *loti* and *gu you* (Hokkien: bread and butter)."

> (Mr Tan, President, GLC)

This use of family, company and country as a cohesive unit was echoed throughout the speech. The individual was not the main focus and the efforts should be for a greater cause such as the family and the country (Huxley, 2000). The notion of Asian value systems is incorporated in the team-building and nation-building process (Suriyadinata, 2004, 2005). The use of army lingo created a sense of affinity and closeness between the senior management and the rest of the company. The speech was deliberately delivered in such a style in order to reach the majority of the audience. The nation building process is also extended to the corporate culture building process. The imagery of a military battalion becoming a corporate battalion was created through the company President's speech. The style of his leadership and being the 'hero' of the company helps shape the corporate culture (see Chapter 2). Chapter 4 illustrated the development process of Singapore and reflects how the nation-building process has been a strong influence on everyday lives. In the discussion in this chapter, the way in which the corporation operates resonates with how the nation has been governed. Hence, I argue that the political economy and nation building process has a significant and direct impact on corporate culture, in a pseudo-military fashion.

Attendance of the employees was mandatory and there was sometimes an uncomfortable tension in the air, especially when someone asked another on the whereabouts of a fellow colleague. Eyes would roll and shoulders shrugged. This was also taken up jovially by the President.

> "very good *ah*, attendance checking, Kin Seng, Joo Leng... thank you very much."
>
> > (Mr Tan, President, GLC)

This is a common practice at meetings too. It created a 'hostile' environment as adults were being checked for their attendance like in schools. It can cause a sense of humiliation and brings back memories of taking school and/ or military registers. However, there was an attempt to 'normalise' this ritual. Nonetheless, this creates a sense of "who's in charge" around here and 'how we ought to do things around here'.

> "Excuse me, I'm not finished yet, this is a Q&A session, not a toilet break, and don't try to run away after going to toilet. Still got dinner after the talks. Please sit down (said in a light-hearted tone). [Audience chuckles]"
>
> > (Mr Tan, President, GLC)

This was a typical 'military fashioned' attitude of Singapore society, and was reflected here at the workplace. Attendance was mandatory at both formal and informal activities. These activities ranged from extra-curriculum activities at schools to 'sports' or 'family days' at military, corporate and government-linked organisations. This general obedience and 'follow-the-rules' trend was also reflected in the corporate environment. This is again reflected in a routine Monday morning team meeting.

> "Oh, got two MIA (missing in action) today? Must get them to sign extra (army phrase: a light punishment)... Oh, they late because they getting cakes for the team? Ok, better not be too late."
>
> > (Andrew, Deputy Director, SME)

Mr Tan (GLC) and Andrew (SME) also played the role of the father figure and military battalion commander in their own organisations. Mr Tan went around the tables before his speech to ask some team leaders how they were doing and to stand up when he refers to them during his speech. He wanted to acknowledge those who performed well and share their success with the rest of the company. The language and imagery used was also very much like how a military commander would speak to their officers-in-charge, instructing them and checking with them if they know of the next strategic or operative actions.

> "So how? Got share with your juniors your achievements? Must share must share. If not, the younger ones don't know. Don't worry, I'll make sure someone reminds you."
>
> (Mr Tan, President, GLC)

This type of 'elders looking after the juniors' attitude was also echoed throughout the fieldwork, especially in the GLC (see also discussion on Asian values in Chapter 7). The mentoring spirit was made explicit by senior managers, even to the extent of being instructional. For example, when John (GLC, Engineer) was mentoring another junior colleague, he said:

> "Why you do it like that? No, I show you how to do it properly. You like a new recruit, better show you how to do it right the first time, ok?"

In another instance, Daniel (Sales Director, SME) was delighted that he secured a new project for his team. He wanted to mentor his team but at the same time, he also engaged an external expert to help them out on this task and wanted to make sure his team understood his intentions.

> "Ok guys, this doesn't happen everyday that we get a big project. We must make use of this opportunity. I've invited Mr Sharma to give us a little

demonstration of how to get us started on this project. Let's pay *attention,* ok?"

(Daniel, Sales Director, SME)

Mr Tan asked a few technical staff if they had enjoyed the GLC day. There were all reluctant to provide an answer but the expressions on their faces gave the message away; they would have preferred to be somewhere else but out of respect (or fear), they put on a smile. He even asked the staff in his speech,

"Do you see yourself as the granddad or father of the coy (phrase used to represent a company of the battalion in the army)? Even in my position as President one day?"

(Mr Tan, President, GLC)

This is a reflection of the discussion in Chapter 3. There is a strong sense of a patriarchal structure (Redding 1994; Folk and Jomo 2003, Hamilton 2004; Yeung 2004). The notion of keeping success within the 'family' (from father to son) or company (developing managers) and building a strong team was evident. Not only did he mention developing new business ventures, he also talked about nurturing talent for the sustainability of the organisation.

"We need to *zai pei ren cai* (Mandarin: cultivate human resources). Our people are the most valuable of all entities. You are our valuables. Without you, we are nothing."

(Mr Tan, President, GLC)

The national service experience is a unique one to Singapore. It is what all Singaporean men of all races, ethnicity and class backgrounds can identify with. Although it depends on the type of vocation they had in their term during national service, they still have a good sense of what it is when the Commander is giving out orders and missions to the battalion. Singaporean women may understand the

language used but there is always an invisible barrier preventing them from being part of this post-national service bond.

The non-Singaporeans were the most excluded group in this respect. The non-Singaporeans were usually 'foreign talent' and some Singaporeans may feel resentful towards them. 'Foreign talent' are also known as highly skilled migrants. They are not the same as foreign workers who are usually low-skilled contract workers and work as domestic helpers or in building/ construction sites. In ex-Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong's national day speech in 2000, he asserted the need to enlarge the foreign talent pool for the survival of modern Singapore (*channelnewsasia.com*, 9 Aug 2000). This was also mentioned in the numerous public forums on the need for 'foreign talent' in Singapore. Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong and Mentor Minister Lee Kuan Yew had both made public statements about the need for the promotion of 'foreign talent' in Singapore (*channelnewsasia.com* 9 Aug 2004, 9 Aug 2005; *The Straits Times*, 23 Jan 2008). 'Foreign talent' are publicly enticed by the Singapore government with attractive benefits to make them choose Singapore as both their home and career base (see contactsingapore.gov.sg). The Singapore Government's website (www.gov.sg) provides a very user-friendly platform to welcome anyone who can be an asset to Singapore. The website also includes information for social passes for dependants, medical health care and schooling information for families. The topic regarding 'foreign talent' is a contentious one, stimulating debates around citizenship and national identity (see Ho, 2006). Some Singaporeans believe the encouragement of 'foreign talent' takes away the attention the state should give to their own citizens. This often upsets some Singaporeans who think that they, as citizens who served national service, are treated as second class to the 'foreign talent' who do not need to

serve national service and pose a threat to their jobs. So, the use of national service 'lingo' in the workplace can be seen as deliberate to strengthen the bond of Singaporeans employees and exclude the 'foreign talent', and hence, reflecting how the national service experience can affect the way in which corporate culture is shaped.

At the GLC Day, company awards, including corporate and military honours, were given out. It was a time to reward publicly those who have been committed to the company and it was also a time to exhibit the 'caring' corporate organisation. The award winners had to come up to the stage to receive a medal from the keynote speaker. As the recipients walked onto the stage to receive their award, their photograph was also projected on the large screen and their achievements announced. This was an annual ritual and the meanings behind such ceremonies and how they were carried out creates how 'things should be done' at the company. The long service awards were awarded in multiples of five years – there were awards given out for 5 years, 10 years, 15 years, 20 years and 25 years of service. This reflected the company's commitment to its loyal employees. The high achievers' awards were given to those who achieved their set targets well in advance. Most of them were from the sales and marketing department. Several awards were given to outstanding performances and they included staff who went beyond their call of duty to secure a project deal, such as working exceptionally long hours and over the public holidays in an overseas location. An example was a mother of two who had to stay over in a foreign country even after her team had left. She had to finish the project and ended up staying over the public holidays to handle unexpected administrative work with the local authorities pertaining to their project.

There was a 2005 Outstanding NS (National Service) Employee Award. This was given to someone who was a top achiever in both the armed forces as well as in the company. This clearly promotes the dual career of an individual. This was only applicable in GLCs and clearly favoured the male workforce. There was also an award given to the best intern placement. This reflected the President's speech on nurturing young talent. The Care Award was a one-off token of money given to employees who recently had a baby. This showed the commitment of the company and how it 'cares' for the welfare of its staff. The government's pro-natal policy (see chapter 4) is also reflected here. The appreciation of the company was explicitly displayed in this session. The appreciation covered professional outstanding performance, domestic welfare of the individual and loyalty to the company. This reward session reflects how the recognition and rewarding of the loyal staff can shape corporate culture. This was a public display of loyalty not only to these staff but also how the staff responded to the company. It was also a platform and a 'motivational' strategy to other staff members of 'how things should be done here'.

After the awards session, there was the Chinese ten-course dinner banquet, a karaoke (ktv) competition, magic show, lucky draw of one hundred prizes and a disco. The ktv competition was an individual-competitor event but the various department heads were encouraged to nominate their best singers to come up to the stage to represent their department. Since the Pop Idol competition burst onto the international media scene, it has also been very popular in Singapore. At the dinner, this mini-version of Pop Idol (ktv competition) was the most inclusive entertainment of the whole evening as everyone (from support to specialist staff) could relate to a ktv competition. The

magic show was more Westernised and some of the support staff did not seem to be engaged in the jokes and puns. However, there was a moment where the magician asked a volunteer,

"Hey, you better work hard, if not, you want me to chop your head?"

The volunteer responded,

"No problem, *anything* [emphasis added] for the group."

This was in the context of an illusionary trick being done on stage. There was laughter from the crowd but it also evoked a sense of discomfort, alluding to being retrenched or 'getting the chop'. The response from the volunteer was typical of how an 'obedient' subordinate would reply. Although most of the staff did not respond to many of the other jokes by the magician, they were however interested in seeing the tricks being performed on stage. There was also loud toasting of drinks whilst the show was going on. It sometimes disrupted those who were concentrating on the show. The toasts were mainly from those sat in the back of the room. The lucky draw took place in several sessions. The final twenty prizes were left to be drawn at the end of the evening where the ballroom was only a quarter filled. The disco party was open to all but only the sales, marketing, HR staff participated in it. This reflects the limited interactions between the employees of the company. Although the awards session was to exhibit and show that the company 'cares'. However, there were mixed responses from the employees during such sessions. There was a small group of employees that showed very little interest in being present, or felt excluded from the activities of the day. This is also a reflection of the interaction between management and employees. From the interaction between the employees at this annual event, it also echoed the overall way in which they interacted back in the office environment; majority of the

employees do engage in the corporate way 'how things are done here' and celebrate it openly. So far, the discussion has illustrated how national service and nation building has been embedded in the individuals and their work practices. The 'way they do things around there' is very much a reflection of the nation building process and national service experiences.

6.3   Language and Corporate Culture in a Multicultural Society

In this section, I discuss how language and 'management speak' can affect corporate culture in Singapore. The 'management speak' portrays a 'corporate' way of communicating at the workplace. Language, in this instance, represents the multicultural society of Singapore. The combination of different Chinese dialects, Tamil, Malay, English and Singlish (a mixture of the languages mentioned) reflects the 'way they speak' in Singapore. Hence, the way in which individuals communicate can affect the way corporate culture is shaped. The GLC Company Day was one of the highlights of the fieldwork. It was an annual event where the whole organisation got together in a day and I could observe the interactions between the management and the workers. All departments and teams started the day with evaluation meetings and then all moved on to a banquet ballroom in the nearby country club, where invited speakers delivered motivational speeches. One of them was by Life Coach Sharoush Sharma whose session was titled "The Future of Biz, relationship in life". The content of his talk echoed what the government of Singapore emphasized most of the time; that the importance of life was about (economic) stability. To achieve stability, one needs a secure home and this security will come from a stable career. Thus, striving hard in one's job was crucial to a stable future and happiness. Sharma's style of talk

was very charismatic, punctuated with plenty of management and motivational phrases.

> "You are what you make yourself to be. Feel the synergy when you join forces with your team mates and create this aura around your team. You can do it only and when only you are committed and believe in it."

> (Sharoush Sharma, guest speaker)

Sharma went on to tell the audience how they should join forces with people from different backgrounds and create a more dynamic team. In the following quotes extracted from his speech, it is apparent that this was the style of language that the GLC company day event was advocating for the employees. It was not just about working in a typical GLC company with influences from the government but being a dynamic private sector company.

> "Hit the target? If you can't, you have to leave. If you can, good for you. But don't leave it to chance. You are your own maker. You create your own downfall. You are the centre of it all."

> "Create a win-win situation. Look at the bright side of all things. Choose the path you want to take. Now!"

> "The only goal you can't accomplish is the one that you don't go after!"

> "I don't believe in walking on fire. But when I did it, it was the most unbelievable feat, ever. Faith and belief is very powerful. Apply this to your everyday life - family and work."

> "Sales. Sell! Sell! Sell! Yes, if you are not cut out to be in it, leave it, don't torture yourself. But once you know you are in the right job, don't waste your time away. Look far and envision your path. Like our grandfathers say, *ai piah chia eh yar* (Hokkien: you need to struggle to achieve success)."

> "Together, we (the company's name) can do it together!"

> "You create the culture and you live in it."

The themes reflected in the above were not only just textbook based 'management speak', they were also adapted to the Singaporean audience, using language (Singlish) and familiar local metaphors. The use of 'management speak' was expected in events like this. However, what was interesting was how it was altered to make it more 'in tune' with what the majority of the audience would understand – Singaporeans. The foreigners (Indian nationals and China nationals) may not fully understand some of the local terms used but can still identify with most of the references to Confucianism and Asian values (see further discussion in chapter 7). Everyone in the audience would understand to some extent what it all meant but those who could appreciate the most would be the Chinese, who formed the majority of the audience. In a multicultural and multilingual society, where mixing between the different ethnic groups is encouraged, language may help to build a bridge between some groups, but it can still exclude those who do not understand it. The Chinese (Singapore and China) will understand the Confucian metaphors but the use of Hokkien may exclude Chinese (China) who do not understand them. The use of language to conjure a certain familiarity with the audience has a definite impact on the construction of corporate culture. In the following extract from a semi-structured interview, I asked Elaine (GLC, HR Director) and Steven (GLC, marketing manager) the impact of Sharoush Sharma's speech.

Raye: What do you think of Sharoush Sharma's speech? What's the impact on the corporate culture here?

Elaine: Well, this is what corporate life is about in Singapore. We have to work together. This is a good opportunity for us to send the same message out. This is our corporate family.

Steven: Actually, all corporate talk always like that. He just make it more applicable to us. Look around here, we have people from different

kinds of experiences and background. But, we need to stick together for the company. Events like this help, I guess.

Managers and individuals are constantly creating their own way of doing things as they try to 'fit' into the places they work in. It is interesting to use the corporate environment as a site to look into a nation that prides itself on the harmonious multi-religious and multi-ethnic community. This can be reflected in the national pledge that is recited daily at school (primary, secondary and junior colleges) assemblies. The networks that they form in the corporate environment as a result of differences (and similarities) are of particular interest. Sklair (2001) writes about a transnational capitalist class being able to capitalise on the global scale, thinking and operating globally. But what he did not specify was if this group had disengaged from their own national embeddedness. Therborn (2000) proposes that the transnational capitalist class should be viewed as if there have concrete settings, and can (re)create a corporate elite, totally independent of their national 'home' base. As such, their collective transnational identity and behaviour are shaped by their transnationalism rather than by their original national identities. However, these transnational professionals are also heavily influenced by their educational experience and home environment (Waters, 2007). In my data, some of the individuals are not locals and they would be seen as part of a transnational group. However, their 'way of doing things' and the languages used at the corporate place was influenced by their own national identities, as well as by the local identities. Hence, the transnational business community is a result of interlocking of international corporate networks and national components (Carroll and Fennema, 2008). In this section, I use examples from the fieldwork to show that corporate culture is influenced by the combination of international and local practices, language and identities. The transnational business

community not only bring in their own experiences, they also absorb some of the local practices, shaping and moulding corporate culture.

There was a general prejudice against people who were only monocultural, being too 'Chinese' or 'Westernized'. This meant that a person can be labelled '*ching cheong*' (Singlish: traditional Chinese) and/or '*deng sua*' (Teochew: conservative Chinese), which alluded to being traditional and old-fashioned or backward. An example of an individual who was typically labelled as '*ching cheong*' or '*deng sua*' in the corporate area was one who spoke English with a very strong Chinese accent, not able to differentiate and pronounce their 'r' and 'l' or 'd' and 't', unable to use fork and knife properly, and wore white socks with black shoes. These characteristics were gathered from informal conversations with numerous participants, for example:

> "*aiyo*... he's too *Ching Cheong* for you! Not your typical guy. He rather sit in at home all the time and don't really socialise with the happening crowd... can't even say pizza properly!"
>
> (Karen, Marketing Manager, MNC)

Being labelled '*ching cheong*' is being the extreme of being a 'banana'. The following conversation gives a clearer picture of what is at the other extreme from being a 'banana' and how it affects corporate culture in a multicultural society. Ho, a Singaporean Chinese, is a financial manager at the MNC.

Raye: Which language do you use with your colleagues and clients?

Ho: I use English. It is more neutral for everyone.

Raye: What do you mean by that? Can you explain a little bit more?

Ho: Well, as you know, we have lots of different people here. My colleagues and clients come from all over the place. So, it is better to speak English. But, I have to say we have to change our terminology.

196

[chuckles] I mean it is bad but being called a banana can be quite irritating. So embarrassing too! My Mandarin has never been good since I was young and people always tease about it. But being *ching cheong* can be worst! [chuckles]

Raye: How does this affect the corporate culture at work?

Ho: As I said, we have many people from all over the place. This is like a melting pot. Or that Swiss guy will say we are like a good fondue. So, we often learn from one another and create our own corporate culture. That's what I like about being here. It is not so stifling and we can have more freedom. We all bring in our own culture.

So, being 'too Westernised' or 'too traditional' was seen as undesirable and being able to have a good mixture of both was welcomed. Someone who spoke English is perceived as modern but at the same time, if he/ she has the ability to speak good Mandarin (even labelled as '*ching cheong*') was a good trait to have. An example of such a desired transnational character would be;

> "James is so *xhat* (Hokkien: dynamic, fantastic). He's from Beijing but got his degree from New York. He's speaks like an American and when he speaks Mandarin, oh my gosh, so irresistible!"
>
> (Alison, Personal Assistant, MNC)

If a person is called a banana or *gan dang* (Hokkien: potato), it meant that person is too Westernized and is not in touch with his or her own culture. Someone who is typically labelled a banana will speak English in a non-Singlish accent, have little or no knowledge of Chinese pop culture, prefers to eat Western food and goes to pubs.

> "He 'bananarised' already. Never see him in the *kopi tiam* (Singlish: local coffee shop). Only Starbucks. Always BK (Burger King) for lunch. So *cham* (Teochew: sad)."
>
> (Goh, Engineer, GLC)

However, if the person was well-versed in the Chinese language too, he or she will be seen as a dynamic and modern person. There seemed to be a clear indication that

being a 'hybrid', 'bicultural' or 'multicultural' individual has an obvious advantage in society. This reflected the importance of the languages the individual could speak and their own personal educational background. In a society which emphasises meritocracy, being perceived as successful is not just about striving well in education but also having that extra edge over the rest of the cohort. In addition, coming from a good family background (class) also gives that person a head start in cultivating this 'hybrid' characteristic. According to Mitchell (1997), this class distinction and manipulation of 'Chineseness', have shaped the lifestyles and consumption patterns of Chinese in Vancouver. In this research, I discuss how the way in which 'Chineseness' and status in society are perceived in the corporate place has a definite impact on the way in which corporate culture is shaped. The data reflect how the level of 'Chineseness' represent the social status, how they can lead a certain lifestyle, and how they behave at the workplace. These practices of everyday lives, inevitably contributes to the shaping of corporate culture. The following quote illustrates how the 'Chineseness' of a person can be deemed as attractive.

> "Hey, don't *siao siao* (Hokkien: crazy). He's Chinese very good too. CL1 (Chinese as first language) *leh*. Not bad, quite a good catch."

> (Loraine, Senior Manager, GLC)

Loraine was referring to a new colleague who comes from such a 'desirable' background. He went to top-ranking schools and was able to speak English and Mandarin very well. In the Social Development Unit (SDU), which is a governmental match-making agency, he will be labelled as a 'hotcake'. In the SDU, clients attend match-making sessions according to their educational background. There are different events for degree and non-degree holders (see discussion in chapter 4). So, to be well-versed in both English and Mandarin is viewed as desirable and admirable. When

Mentor Minister Lee Kuan Yew was Senior Minister, he stressed the need to nurture such a core group of Singaporeans. In order for the Singapore economy to stay competitive, the people need to be more dynamic and respond to the demands of external economies such as India and China. At the National University of Singapore, there is the 'Bicultural Immersion Programme', specially designed for highly motivated and bright undergraduates to be enrolled on exchange programmes in China. At the 2006 elections, there was deliberate emphasis on bicultural candidates such as Josephine Teo, Lee Yi Shyan, Lee Wai Meng and Goh Meng Seng.

> "In being bicultural and bilingual, we can communicate with the residents even more, to the extent that they feel they are better understood, their needs are understood, and they can convey their message across."

> *(channelnewsasia.com*, 25 April 2006)

With the constant reminder from government officials that it is important to be bicultural, there is a growing pressure on Singaporeans to be not only bilingual but also bicultural. This was illustrated in a public speech made by Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong. This has also further implications on the use of language in the corporate place.

> "It was moments like this that reminded the Senior Minister of the importance of producing bicultural Singaporeans...

> Said Mr Goh (senior minister), 'I need two people to express one thought; in future one person can express that thought. How do we do that? First, studying English in Singapore, and then maybe some bright students should pursue their undergraduate studies in China and go to the best universities in China. And then later on (they can) do their postgraduate in the US. If they can succeed in doing that, we would really have a top class of bicultural Singaporeans.

> To be bicultural goes beyond knowing how to speak two languages; Mr Goh also highlighted the importance of understanding and appreciating both cultures.

Being able to express oneself beautifully in both languages is one important trait of a bicultural person."

Being able to speak good Mandarin and English is also said to indicate that a person attended a top-ranking school and was able to take both languages at first language level. Only the top 10% of the schooling population were offered the opportunity to study both English and their mother-tongue as first languages. From the accent, one can usually 'identify' the background of the person's alma mater. This was often a talking point amongst Singaporeans. So, the way a person speaks also reflects their class and distinction from others and this has a significant impact in the forming and shaping of corporate culture. The individuals' personal characteristics are brought into the corporate environment and the 'way they do things' is very much determined by 'the way they are'. In the following extract from an interview, Steven (SME, senior marketing manager) explains how being bicultural and the level of 'Chineseness' can affect corporate culture.

Raye: Why is she so different from the rest of the group?

Steven: *aiya*, you cannot tell *meh*? She's so *ang mo* (Hokkien: Westernized), must be from a convent school. What she do also very *ang mo*. Not like us, more Chinese. But, nowadays, our office now also have many locals, *real foreigners and also locals who act like westerners.* [emphasis added]"

Raye: What do you mean by real foreigners and locals who act like westerners?

Steven: Simple. Real foreigners are those not born and bred here. They are more upper class, you know? They shop at Cold Storage, never go wet markets. They may live here but not really one of us. The fake westerners? Simple again. They are born and bred here but they think

they are like those real foreigners. Whatever others do, they also want. Can be confusing, right?

Raye: Ok. So, how does this affect corporate culture at the workplace?

Steven: This is Singapore. We speak many languages. Government says we are a multicultural society. So, corporate culture also changing because we have so many different types of people.

Raye: Can you give one or two examples?

Steven: Sure. If you are more Chinese, you respect the elders more and don't talk as if the senior is like your friend. The *ang mos* or banana locals do that. What's with the 'mate', 'cool' and 'awesome' slangs they import from overseas? You don't hear the seniors say that, right? The respect is lost when you talk like that. Not serious enough. Another one? Ok, let's take for example when there's a team project. You cannot expect the team leader to stay late and the junior staff go home, right? But the youngsters nowadays just don't have this same attitude. They think society is very equal and they are also very clever on who they do things for. Even when we have functions, these youngster don't know the etiquette and pour drinks in the wrong order! Just so not Chinese enough.

Raye: That's interesting. Are they all like that?

Steven: Well, maybe not all. Those that come from good family teaching and background know better. I guess it is ok to be modern but don't forget one's roots, you know what I mean? You can be both.

According to Edwards (1985), language attitudes and use of language are part of the social fabric of a community. The language used goes beyond communication purposes but also acts as a symbolic affirmation of the community's identity. This was also reflected in my fieldwork; in a multicultural environment, language was used as a tool to affirm the identity of the group. There were a few instances when the colleagues were conversing in Mandarin and one of them would suddenly remind them to speak in English so that others could understand what they were saying. In

one instance, at the GLC office, three Chinese colleagues (Jon, Cheng Hua, Peter) were having a conversation in Mandarin and Hokkien when an Indian colleague (Thinesh) joined them. Peter started to change from using Mandarin to English so as to include Thinesh. However, Cheng Hua teased Peter as Thinesh was fluent in both Mandarin and Hokkien. Peter replied (translated from Mandarin to English),

> "This is so embarrassing. I thought I was doing the right thing, follow what our government says. [Chuckles] I guess we can use any language provided we can all understand it. I was only going by the book."

> (Peter, Marketing Director, GLC)

Apart from talking about work, Chinese colleagues would speak Mandarin or other Chinese dialects but swap to English or Singlish when other non-Chinese colleagues join the group. According to Valentine *et al* (2008), language is used in connecting (or disconnecting) people in a situated context and language also plays a part in (re)making identities.

At the GLC, there are two Malay women (Neena and Selena) who seemed to be only interacting between themselves most of the time, unless they had to interact with others regarding work. They have breakfasts and lunched together. They speak Malayu Bahasa to one another and English to other colleagues who are non-Malays. They declined to be interviewed but after a few attempts, they finally granted me an interview. Their initial reluctance led me to wonder if they felt a 'sense of belonging' to the group. They did not wear the traditional head-dress (*tudong*) but do dress in a modern fashion. I requested on the last day to ask them a few questions over lunchtime and they finally agreed. Perhaps, they did not feel part of the majority of the company, and felt that their contributions were not as significant to those that I had

already spoken to. Another reason could be that they are not comfortable enough to share more information about their workplace. However, they seemed to be comfortable being the 'quiet' group and were not too affected about being excluded.

> "There are not many people who can speak Malay here. Only Neena, Yanti and me. But we don't speak Malay at work. Not nice, right? But we do joke in Malay."
>
> (Selena, Secretary, MNC)

> "I don't really think about it?.. Ha! This is Singapore. We live here. This is life. We feel safe here. Ok, we are not a fully Muslim country like Malaysia but although I got relatives there, I don't want to live there. Shopping is cheaper there but life more happening here. Singaporeans complain too much. Just enjoy life!"
>
> (Neena, Secretary, MNC)

From their quotes, it is apparent that both Selena and Neena did not feel fully included at the workplace but did not find it to be a problem. Hence, the level of cohesiveness at the workplace can be questioned in a multicultural society. However, at the GLC Day, the President of the GLC used some phrases in *Malayu Behasa* during his speech in an attempt to include the Malay staff. He talked about the need to understand other cultures and business practices. He also talked about the different possible geographical regions for further business ventures. This also shows the how he utilises language to promote multiculturalism within the corporation.

> "... the cooking period differs as we are all different... so, the prospects may be different. We need to be sensitive to all... there are so many similarities and differences between West, East and Middle East. Our targets and goals must be focused. We must stay together, then we can have more opportunities."
>
> (Mr Tan, President, GLC)

This is also in response to the growing market in the Middle East and the recent signing of trade agreements between Singapore and some of the Middle Eastern countries. It also represented the changing face of corporate culture and how it is

embracing other cultures and practices. This also reflects the current discussion on corporate culture that it facilitates business practices. Furthermore, this demonstrates the need to include social-spatial factors when considering the construction of corporate culture. The role of corporate culture is not just for expansion of business opportunities but also for cohesiveness of the corporation. Corporate culture may not just be a management tool to ensure optimal efficiency, and a more complete understanding of corporate culture may contribute to a more meaningful way of understanding different business practices and systems for a sustainable corporate purpose.

At the GLC Day, most of the Malay women wearing the head-dress *(tudong)* sat together during the talk. They also ate together during the refreshment breaks. During dinner, they had their own banquet table during their meal times as *halal* food was served only at their table. However, I did notice that the numbers present fell sharply after the first few dishes were served. A few Malay women who did not wear the *tudong* also shared the same table but did not sit with them during the talk. The Singaporean Indian employees mingled around more with the Singaporean Chinese. They did not mix well with the Indian nationals from India. I am not entirely sure of the reasons. When in a group of Singaporeans Chinese and Indians, the common language was Singlish. I observed that once the Singaporean Indians left the group, the conversation often took place in Chinese (Mandarin or dialect). This was common practice amongst the support and technical staff.

The technical staff were casually dressed – jeans and polo t-shirts. They did not mix with the admin/ sales/ HR/ marketing staff. They also did not mix with the

engineering staff. They tended to be louder and conversed more in dialects. The engineers also kept to themselves. The Indian nationals, China nationals and Singaporean engineers did not mix much and tended to have their own table during the dinner banquet. The tables were set according to the departments. The upper management sat nearer to the stage, followed by the marketing/ sales, engineers, business development, HR, technical and security. The nearer the tables were to the stage, the more 'formal' was the dress code. This was also a public display of hierarchy and structure in the organisation.

The lack of interaction between employees may reflect how corporate culture in Singapore is shaped predominantly by the ethnic majority, and the ethnic minorities become the followers of 'what is the norm' in the organisation. Also, the lack of ethnic minorities in top positions of the company may affect the inclusion of ethnic minorities in the organisation. There were about 30 Singaporean Malays and Indians in the company. There was a group of Chinese nationals from China and Indian nationals from India. They were all engineers. They tend to keep to themselves and do not socialise much with the Singaporean colleagues. However, they would always be part of the celebration party when the team was successful in a bid. Their eating and drinking habits were also different from the Singaporean Chinese and Indians. Some of the marketing managers took this opportunity to learn a few more tips on how to interact with Chinese from China. People from China are often called *'da lu'* (Mandarin: mainlander Chinese) by other Chinese and this can sometimes be seen as condescending. It has a connotation of being backwards and from the 'original

village[11]. In Singapore, a more politically correct term used is China nationals. This also applied to Indian nationals. However, there were a huge number of contract workers from India and China. There was some tension between the Chinese nationals and Singaporean Chinese. One of the main issues was the inability to speak accurate (Beijing) Mandarin. Singaporean Chinese are not as well educated in Chinese literature due to the heavy influence of the British education system. Singapore follows the British GCE 'O' and 'A' levels system. Only those who are in the top 10% of the cohort take Chinese and English as a first language. The rest of the cohort will take English as a first language and Chinese as a second language. So, some of the China Chinese may view Singaporean Chinese as 'rootless' or 'bananas'; meaning that they (Singaporeans) have forgotten where they originate from as they are not as well versed in Chinese literature as themselves. On the other level, Singaporean Chinese view that English is an important language and most of the Chinese nationals do not speak very fluent English. So, there are communication breakdowns at times and they lead to some tension. Moreover, the China Chinese do not understand Singlish and 'army language', which is extensively used in this workplace. The Singaporean Chinese communicate better with other Singaporean Indians and Malays as they share a common language – Singlish. This is quite a common phenomenon in most workplaces. The following quote reflects an attempt to include Chinese nationals in the Singaporean workplace.

> "I have to get *bai jiu* (Mandarin: white rice spirits) for the social. I don't drink it but those China guys would want to have it. No choice, must keep them happy in the team. Just doing my job. It's so strong and I have to mix it with 7up. I prefer wine, lighter. But still have to buy both as I know for sure the bar won't have *bai jiu*. Don't want them (China nationals) to feel left out."

> (Tess, Marketing Manager, GLC)

---

[11] Original village refers to the origin of their ancestors in China. It is a direct translation from the Chinese language.

206

This was a situation where Tess, a Singaporean Chinese, tried to include her team members from China by making sure they have their choice of alcohol at the company event.

According to Ma (2003), Chinese diasporic communities display extensive internal sub-ethnic diversity, even within the same country of settlement. Such differences are due to the combined effect of global and local factors in the formation of place. The following extract from a semi-structured interview reflects the differences between Singaporean Chinese, Chinese nationals and Malaysian Chinese. There was resentment between Singaporean Chinese and Chinese nationals and Loraine (GLC, marketing manager) goes on to say how people accept the tensions and differences as a matter of fact and how it affects corporate culture. This reflects the diversity of being Chinese in Southeast Asia and in Singapore. This also contributes to the shaping of corporate culture in multicultural (and multiethnic) Singapore.

Loraine: Hey, doing business with them is not easy. Yes, we are all Chinese but mine (spoken and written Chinese) is not as good as theirs. But still have to face up to it and ask some of the China engineers for help. I know they laugh inside but what to do, still have to do it. But I tell you what, their English sucks! But then again, they don't really need to use it too. So, it balances it up. This is Singapore, we have to accept it. Foreign talents and local talents, Chinese or not Chinese, must work together for same goal. Just close one eye and get on with it.

Raye: That's interesting. So, how does this affect corporate culture?

Loraine: Ok, of course you can't be best friends even if we are Chinese. We have to understand there are differences in the kind of Chinese. Here, we have more of them and we have to take them into consideration. We can't change them, right? I've seen things change quite a lot in recent years.

Raye: Oh I see. Can you elaborate a little bit more?

Loraine: Over the last few years, we have more and more Chinese nationals coming over to work as engineers. We try to include them and can also learn from them. The team is more diverse if they are up for it. Some of them are very good. But I can tell you that our local guys of course feel threatened.

Raye: What about Malaysian Chinese? Do you think they have the same issues that the Chinese nationals have?

Loraine: Malaysian Chinese are different. They've been here much longer. Their culture more closer to ours, right? Manglish and Singlish sound the same also. We are all Chinese but also have differences. But this is Singapore, remember, we've got one common target and let's get the job done.

The above conversation shows the complexities amongst the Chinese community. It also reflects how the diversity can work together and hence, influence 'way things are done here'. This section has examined how the use of language, reflecting the cultural diversity, can affect the corporate culture in Singapore.

6.4   Conclusion

From the discussion, it can be seen that Singapore nation building process has a definite and significant impact on the construction and shaping of corporate culture. The public campaigns promoting a multi-racial society, national service (civil defence force, police, navy, army and air force) and language used, all play a part in (re)production of societal characteristics and political economy. The nation building processes can also diffuse into the corporate workplace, influencing the formation of corporate culture. The way in which people carry out their everyday lives and material practices, which are influenced by the nation building process, is evidently (re)created in the workplace. Discussion in chapters 5 and 6 has demonstrated how the nation

building process has left a 'lingering effect' on corporate culture. The labour regime also contributed to the corporate climate of Singapore. There may be resistance to the 'party line' of doing things but the overall image is one of conformity (see chapter 4). The people are 'shaped to do things in a certain way' in this particular framework and characteristics of this structure had been transferred to their workplaces. The emphasis on unity, teamwork and sense of urgency regardless of ethnicity or race at the workplace appears to have clear priority - to 'get the job done'. The impact of the national service experienced at the corporate place is deeply embedded in both the male and female workforce. In this chapter, I have provided evidence of how the nation building process and national service has major effects on the Singapore societal culture and corporate culture. The comradeship between national service men and reservists has a long-lasting effect and is even (re)created in the corporate workplace. The (in)active participation in national service is also a 'way of life' in the corporate workplace. Both men and women are part of this process and (sub)consciously incorporate lasting effects of national service in the workplace, allowing such practices to be part of their everyday 'corporate' lives; facilitating business practices at the corporate environment. National service is embedded in the societal culture of Singapore and it is evident that the national service experience is fluid and flows through to the corporate environment, and plays a part in shaping corporate culture. Hence, it is apparent that the political and institutional process of the nation building process has a significant and direct impact on corporate culture

In a multi-cultural and multi-racial society, Singapore exemplifies the place-based dynamics of the intersection between cultural maintenance within specific ethnic communities and nation building (Kong and Yeoh, 2003). Language is used to

identify with different social, ethnic groups and Chinese diasporic communities. Language is also used as a code at the workplace to break down social barriers. In this chapter, the discussion on the use of language reflects the importance of it as a medium to relate with the workforce; the use of 'management speak', Singlish, cultural references and 'army talk' are all used at accordingly to relate to various groups and individuals at the corporate workplace. Furthermore, the combination of transnationals and local professionals creates a distinct style on 'how they speak' at the workplace and this shapes the way in which employees relate to one another, thus influencing the corporate culture. The examples from my fieldwork have demonstrated that corporate culture can be influenced by the combination of international and local practices, language and identities. The transnational business community not only bring in their own experiences, they also absorb some of the local practices, shaping and moulding corporate culture. Hence, the use of language to (re)connect with the different groups at the workplace is also a 'way of life' both at the social and corporate place, and as a result shapes corporate culture. This chapter has explored how significant features of the Singapore nation building process have shaped corporate culture. The effects of the political and institutional processes (see chapter 4) have evidently contributed to the moulding of corporate culture. In the next chapter, I further examine how corporate culture can be influenced by institutional and cultural values. The empirical discussion will reflect whether issues such as Asian values, Confucianism, *guanxi* and *mianzi* can have an impact on corporate culture.

Chapter 7

Corporate Culture: Confucianism, Asian Values, Education, *Guanxi* and *Mianzi*

"The father should be righteous.
The elder brother should have brotherly love and care for his younger brother.
The younger brother should be respectful.
The son should be filial and serve his parents.
Husband and wife should have a sense of obligation to each other.
There must be a distinction between man and woman.
Children should study.
Children should be able to understand ritual decorum, rightness, integrity and shame..."

(Confucius, translated in de Bary, 1998, pp. 74 -75)

7.1   Introduction

The discussion in chapter 2 has suggested a wider framework for conceptualising corporate culture. The purpose of this empirical chapter is to illustrate how Asian values, Confucianism, education, *guanxi* (interpersonal relationships) and *mianzi* (face) can influence the shaping of corporate culture. The cultural traits embedded in society inevitably shape the way individuals carry out their tasks in the workplace. The individuals' experiences outside the corporate field are also important when examining corporate culture. This chapter illustrates how the shared meanings and

assumptions of the employees were significantly influential in informing the corporate culture of particular workplaces.

Societal characteristics, such as Asian values, Confucianism, *guanxi*, *xinyong* (trust), *mianzi*, education and economic background, gender and ethnic relations, all affect the individual worker and the corporate workplace. The discussion in Chapter 3 on Chinese capitalism reflected on how Chinese values and beliefs affect economic and business practices. As the corporate environment in Singapore evolves and interacts more intensely with the global economy, it receives more influences from non-Chinese communities. This process in a society like Singapore has many implications. The Chinese and Asian influences are reflected in the interviews and observation. The non-Chinese and non-Asian influences are usually termed as 'bananarisation' or being 'McDonaldised'; to be labelled a banana or potato is a sweeping statement on the process of diluting traditional Chinese or Asian way of life and preferring a Western way of life. However, the process of modernisation does not necessarily mean that the Asian values are being eroded by Western influences or Western education. These are still deeply embedded within the values of the modern society. Hence, cultural myths, stories and beliefs have a significant impact on individuals, and a distinct style of corporate culture develops.

In this chapter, I use data from fieldwork to explore how aspects of the everyday affect corporate culture. I highlight how Confucianism, *guanxi*, *mianzi*, Asian values and education can shape corporate culture. The daily lives of individual workers are highly influenced by these cultural and societal characteristics and in (re)producing these features in the workplace, they are influencing the corporate 'way of doing

things'. Firstly, Asian values and Confucian teachings are embedded within individuals. I illustrate how this embeddedness has affected their 'way of doing things' in the workplace and how the process contributes to the moulding of corporate culture. The influences of such values and teachings have been inculcated through the education system as well as cultural folklores (see Barr, 2002; Kong and Yeoh, 2000). It is also reflected in popular culture and political statements. Secondly, *guanxi* and *mianzi* are dominant characteristics in the social life of a multicultural Singaporean society and this has a significant impact on corporate culture. They are frequently used as point of reference by individuals in the workplace. Thirdly, the language and style of speech (individuals, managers and directors) reflect the multicultural and cosmopolitan dimension of society (see Ang, 2003; Beardsmore, 2003). Unpacking the language from interviews and ethnographic observations gives a deeper insight into the mechanics of corporate culture. The use of non-standard English (Singlish), which is a reflection of their social life, contributes to the shaping of corporate culture. Lastly, the education background of the interviewees has highlighted significant contributions to the shaping and moulding of corporate culture in Singapore. The combination of a local and Western educational experience, have created a distinctive style of corporate culture, allowing individuals to adapt to the different 'way of doing things' according to the needs and demands of the situation.

7.2   Confucian and Asian Values

As explored in Chapter 3, it is not possible to separate Confucianism from the various East Asian cultures it inhabits and which it helps shape. At the level of popular culture, Confucianism has a powerful hold over the social cognition of people living under its precepts (Barr, 2002). People in the East Asian region look to Confucian

ethics to provide a normative worldview, and an ethical discourse for society. This is one of the ways of rationalising relations between government, society and the individual. The influence of Confucianism can be seen in Korea, Japan, Thailand, Vietnam, Taiwan and Singapore (see Cauquelin *et al*, 1998; Barr, 2002; Warner, 2003). In chapter 3, I examined the presence of Chinese business communities in Southeast Asia and how they function in the region. The position of the individual in Chinese society cannot be fully understood without a discussion of the thoughts of the sage Confucius (551 – 479 B.C.) and his disciples. They have exerted a potent influence on Chinese culture through the centuries (De Bary, 1998; Kao, 1993). Confucianism is a system of ethics and morals rather than a religion. It stresses the obligations of people to one another. It is a cultural force that contributes to the formation of Southeast Asian conceptions of the human person, the relationship between the individual person, society and government (Ma, 2003). These embedded cultural traits are very fluid and the data from my fieldwork illustrate how they flow from social practices to the corporate place, thereby affecting corporate culture.

The relationship between individuals is summarised as:

> *"Zhang you nei wai, yi fa su ci yan* (In a family, parents and children, husband and wife, the older and younger should each do their duty. They should all abide strictly by the rules of behaviour and use appropriate language."
>
> (Maxims by Zhu Zi, translated by Wu, 1998, p. 79)

As discussed in Chapter 3, Confucius sets out the responsibilities of individuals toward one another based on five human relationships; ruler and subject, husband and wife, father and son, brother and brother, and friend and friend (Seligman, 1999; Barr, 2002; Cauquelin *et al*, 1998). It is highly patriarchal and inherently conservative, and it advocates a social order that emphasises duty, loyalty, honour, filial piety, sincerity,

respect for age and seniority. These traits remain valued amongst the Chinese and Southeast Asian community, and can even be seen in the way 'things are done' in family businesses and the corporate workplace. In the following quote, the founder of modern Singapore concisely summarises the difference between Asian values and Confucianism, and how these values are deeply embedded in the lives of people in Singapore:

> "I don't refer to Asian values... I talk about Confucianist values, not Asian values. There are as many Asian values as there are different types of Asians. There are Hindu values, Muslim values, Buddhist values and Confucianist values. Even among Confucianists, there are differences, though they form one coherent group. Those values are not going to change fundamentally. I'm not trying to defend Asian values... I'm saying that you're not going to have culture change overnight. These are deep-seated habits, embedded in the subconscious of a people."
>
> (Lee Kuan Yew, *Asiaweek*, 21 May 2007)

The above quote summarises concisely the interpretation of Asian values and Confucian values in a multicultural but predominantly Chinese nation. The public endorsement of this ethos by Lee Kuan Yew reinforces the vital mechanics and the workings of the social order. This gives us an indication of the society's reliance and focus on Asian values and Confucianism. In the interviews I conducted, the differences between Asian and Confucian values were not made very distinct by the interviewees, and the terms were often used interchangeably. This clearly reinforces the embeddedness of Confucianism and Asian values in the society. This cultural aspect overtly dominates the way of thinking and affects the way the individuals conduct themselves in the social and corporate environment. In what follows, I discuss the themes that were raised in fieldwork that reflect how Confucian (and Asian) values affect corporate culture.

7.2.1 Ruler and Subject: Seniority and Servility

In this section, I focus on the notion of ruler and subject in Confucian values. It reflects a hierarchy between authority and those under them. This ruler and subject relationship can be seen as structured, systematic and reproduced as senior-junior relationship in the workplace. However, this can also be perceived as perfunctory, and a somehow slavish allegiance to outmoded rituals of submission and deference. The 'emperor' (or ruler) alludes to either the government of the state or a senior colleague in the workplace, and subjects are represented by either the citizens or subordinates.

> "You know what? Whatever rubbish they throw at me, no choice but still do it. Don't argue with your elders... But sometimes, I think to myself, what era we are in? So what if he's the boss?
>
> (Lim, Assistant Director, SME)

The quote above is taken from Lim, an assistant director of a SME. She clearly accepts the demands from her director not only because he is her boss, but because he is her senior in rank. She is obviously not fully satisfied with carrying out this specific instruction but still decided to carry on with it. However, she reflects and questions her position at the end of the conversation, and ponders over the legitimacy of her servile attitude. However, in another instance, there was a reversal of roles as Lim assumed the role of the elder (senior rank) and 'instructs' her subordinates to carry out her 'orders'. Although it was done in a light manner and punctuated with laughter, the words used show explicitly the influence (and power relations) of this enforcement of 'senior-junior' relationship in the workplace.

> "Hey Ah Xiong, a bit difficult, I know. Can you please don't think too much and just follow along with your elders? [chuckles all round] Respect the *lao ren jia* (old people)."
>
> (Lim, Assistant Director, SME)

Later, in a separate conversation, Lim laments;

> "Nowadays, young people, too much McDonald's, what to do? Talk back too much. Sometimes ok but sometimes [sighs]. Not like when I was starting, where got like them? They like being modern but all this kind of negative Western influences are not good. "

<div align="right">(Lim, Assistant Director, SME)</div>

Lim refers to the erosion of Confucian values of respecting the elders due to the impact of non-Chinese (specifically Western) influences. The reference to McDonalds is a very common expression to describe the erosion of what is deemed as good Confucian values due to the consumption of Western products and interaction with Western culture. It is a symbolic statement to highlight the negative impact of Western culture and was seen many times during the course of the fieldwork. In this example, Lim is referring to how the younger generation have lost the expected respect (or even *kowtowing*) for seniority due to modernisation and Lim continues to generalise this modernisation as 'being Westernised'.

In Chinese popular culture, there have been many Confucianist teachings on regulating family and the self. Zhu Zi's maxim has been read and applied by many Chinese in their personal, family and social life. Zhu Zi expressed the direct relationship between the individual, family and the Singaporean society (Wu, 1998; Barr, 2002; Warner 2003).

> "*Wei guan xin cun jun guo* (A man serving as an official ought to have the interests of the emperor and the nation at heart)."

<div align="right">(Maxims by Zhu Zi, translated by Wu, 1998, p. 195)</div>

The above theme is prevalent throughout the data collected. The 'emperor' is the President or Director of the company and the nation can be either the company or the country. The following quotes illustrate this;

> "The world is too big for me to save. I just answer to my *huang di* (Mandarin: emperor) and my *guo jia* (Mandarin: country). The rest will let the invisible hand work its wonders."
>
> (Peter, Senior Manager, GLC)

> "Nowadays, no kings and queens. But just imagine there are. I'm the most loyal!"
>
> (Jessie, Manager, SME)

The use of an imaginary emperor, king or queen reflects the effect of cultural myths and folklores in the individual's mind. The allusion to such imagery suggests an affectionate affiliation to their historical and cultural roots. The following quote again illustrates the trust the people have in the government to provide a stable economy and safe society, conducive for businesses (see also chapter 4).

> "I guess it's different when we are so independent now. But still, closed doors, we have a very cohesive system. I guess being in Singapore gives us that extra edge. Our government looks after us. So, of course it is good. They protect the companies. So, where got complain? Not like those corrupted governments [whispers] like the Thais and Viets. So crazy over there. Over here, not the same because we got our *zheng hu* (Hokkien: governor)!"
>
> (Dominic, Manager, GLC)

The allusion to the head of the company or the government as emperor conjures a sense of unconditional loyalty and servility. This sycophantic attitude reflects an aspect of corporate culture, and how the employees kowtow to their superiors by creating these stories for themselves and explaining their actions. In the quote below, Teo (manager, GLC) publicly proposes a toast to HR manager Eileen in an obsequious manner.

"Lai lai, rang wo jing Ci Xi[12] tai hou yi bei (Mandarin: Come, let's raise our glasses to our empress dowager)."

(Teo, Manager, GLC)

This was done at the GLC day over the evening banquet. It is a very flattering way of acknowledging and praising someone. Furthermore, this displays a great sense of loyalty and admiration for the other person. This reflects the effect of the adoration for Eileen – how her position has been elevated to the status of 'empress' (ruler).

"... our Eileen. She's the best. She's always around and never say no type. Put your trust in her and she always put things right. Don't get in her way and you do your best. She'll fight for you."

(Lee, Assistant Manager, GLC)

Such Chinese cultural characteristics and historical stories are very much alive and being (re)enacted in the everyday lives of a modern (and Westernised) corporate environment. The use of such cultural references also symbolises power in the workplace. Moreover, these symbols are more than just indicators of power (see Hall, 1994; Grint, 2005). They may also play an important role in the exercise of power. Eileen uses her 'empress' status to ensure that her 'subjects' get their tasks completed within the targeted period.

In the following example, Huat (taxi driver), talks about the relationship between the government and citizens. Huat used to be an owner of a SME. After his business went into liquidation, he became a taxi driver.

"*Ho say ho say* (Hokkien: excellent). Nowadays, our government really take care of us. Yes, we *kana* (Hokkien: being) squeezed like grapes but just look at

---

[12] Empress Ci Xi, also known as The Empress Dowager, is a popular figure and affectionately adored in Chinese folklore.

219

those poor things[13]. No place to stay and no government to take care. We must *pai ti gong* (Hokkien: count our blessings and pray to the holy deity)."

<div align="right">(Huat, ex-owner of a SME)</div>

He displays adoration and respect for the government of Singapore. He acknowledges the monetary obligations to the government, and defends the need for taxation[14] as an overall benefit for the economy. He compares the local government to the neighbouring countries, which do not have a stable economy, and how the locals must count their blessings and be thankful. This example shows the Confucian gratitude and obligations towards the country. Huat was lamenting whilst taking me to my next meeting at a GLC building. He was interested in what work I was doing and with his business background, we had an informal conversation about what he thought were the contributing factors in shaping corporate culture in Singapore.

Raye: What do you think are the factors that shape corporate culture in Singapore?

Huat: We are so multicultural. Many factors of course. But you have to always remember that this is still Singapore. We are very safe and protected society. We have so many *ang mos* (Hokkien: Caucasians). But we also have so many nowadays from China and India. So many. Of course, the office type, not the construction type. Still counts right? But also the type of companies. So many kinds, very mixed. But you must remember this is Singapore. Still very *Asian*[15]. PAP[16] takes care of everything. That's why so many others want to set up business here. We all have to cooperate if not will lose out to Hong Kong and China. [emphasis added]

From the conversation with Huat, it is apparent that he feels the government (PAP) is very influential in the shaping of corporate culture. Despite being a cosmopolitan

---

[13] Huat is referring to neighbouring countries that are not as economically developed.
[14] It is a common talking point amongst Singaporeans on the numerous indirect taxes imposed by the government.
[15] In this context, it also refers to being traditional and conservative.
[16] The popular abbreviation for People's Action Party, the ruling party of Singapore government.

society, his response indicates a close relationship between the citizens and government, and there is an obligation between the two. He acknowledges the modern dimension of society but emphasised that it is still an Asian society, and hence reflects the importance of Asian values on the shaping of corporate culture. The multicultural term here is used to describe the ethnic mix of the Singaporean society, which is predominantly Chinese. Huat acknowledges the ethnic mix but also suggests that the Confucian values have a more significant presence.

In the next example, Arthur, deputy director of a MNC says:

> "Yes, a bit strict here but there must be a reason for it. No pain no gain. No matter how they can criticise our government. It's other people's business. They don't live here, right? Of course, I can also say a lot about it. I'm not scared but what for? You go ask those in the streets. Come on, [pause] they are not stupid. People who complain too much have too much free time. No country, [pause] where got home? Very Chinese right? I know this is what I say but it is true. My French colleagues and friends are quite different. They are definitely more daring but in our culture, what for? Looking for trouble, is it? [laughs]"

> (Arthur, Deputy Director, MNC)

Arthur concisely summarises the relationship between the government and citizens (ruler and subjects) in the Singaporean context. The individuals may have the opportunity to be vocal, but it may not be the most suitable option. In the best interest of the nation, he indicates it is of mutual advantage for the citizens to have complete trust in their government, and avoid unnecessary confrontations or complications. He then compares the situation to a Western society where he worked and lived for many years. He carries on in the following quote, and this clearly reflects how this ruler-subject relationship is being played out in corporate culture.

Raye: How does this aspect of society affect corporate culture?

Arthur: In many ways. And it is even more in companies that got government links. For us in MNC, have but maybe not as much as we are American-styled. I give you example. You see my Finance Head? He's the boss and everyone *kowtow* (Hokkien: bow) to him. And when you see him with his own boss, he also really *kowtow* also. There's a lot of protocol and I am sure you must know all that. Since young, we learn it. In school we learn it. In army, you better show it. At work, of course you at one level or the other, show it. No choice. It's in our blood already, right? Some more example is when you are given a task. Of course you brainstorm the project through and through. After that, you don't take over and you must let the leader lead. This is talking about business. But in business, you must have discipline. I once had someone talk too much even after we decide on things. Where got team spirit? The leader is right after the team discussion. If not good, next time then change. This is not to say we like *kampong* (Malayu: village) chickens or no-head turtles. We'll say things only when necessary. But must also be a good team player.

This explicitly shows how the notion of junior-senior role helps shape corporate culture. The servility attitude has been strongly ingrained in the individuals, and it is also being reflected in their performance at work. The whole aura at the corporate place, the interactions between these individuals at various level of management and departments, create this specific style of corporate culture. In the following example, it reinforces how the junior-senior relationship can affect corporate culture. During a lunchtime conversation, Mel, a 36 years old HR manager of a SME talks about her dilemma with her father, and how she cannot express herself with him as freely as she would like. This is due to her upbringing, and how she must not 'over challenge' her parents (elders) or it will be deemed as rude. Thus, the formality of the language she uses must be appropriate. This has a direct impact on her performance at the workplace as she deals with human resources, and manages people from all ages. She needs to be professional and yet respectful of the older personnel in the company. She

knows of the issue with older employees who have problems taking orders from a younger HR manager like herself. When asked to give an example, she simply said,

> "Well, same situation, two different aged person, of course I say it a bit differently. Of course, have to give chance and see situation. But usually the younger ones have to just take it. I won't play the rank game but be professional. Also, they new generation, don't really care also, right? I just say direct English to them... But for the older guys, headache! Cannot be too rude, right?... Must say something nice nice along the way. Lucky I got training at home! [chuckles] Actually, still professional but more action action language. Just got to use instincts and stay professional. I'm sure your *ang mos* (Hokkien: Caucasians) over there no need for such *wayang* (Malayu: opera/ drama), right?... Of course respect the olders but no need to put extra ingredients."
>
> (Mel, HR Manager, SME)

This illustrates how her background (education and language skills) and cultural identity (awareness of Confucianist values) are put to practice in the workplace. Her own embedded cultural traits affect the way she does things. She reacts differently to identical situations according to the age of the person involved. She also responds to them differently, accordingly to their background, and this sets the tone for her HR department. From the other HR staff, it clearly shows that Mel is aware of such cultural issues and incorporates them in her professional life, ensuring that clients and employees are kept satisfied, and hence maintaining the smooth operation of the department. Her assistant Amy says,

> "We very lucky to have her. Only she can handle such things. I lose patience sometimes but no choice when have to do it. Not so natural for me but for Mel, she's tip top on it... A lot of our guys are the *ah cheks* (Hokkien: uncles/ older men) type. Some more, our company so small. Got to practise a bit of diplomatic. I think over time, I'll learn more to deal with it. Now, all the *xiong* (Hokkien: difficult) ones Mel can handle."
>
> (Amy, HR Assistant Manager, SME)

Amy is obviously aware of the older-younger/ senior-junior sensitivity in her job area. She also reveals the options available and what is the most appropriate. This shows how cultural background (awareness of Confucianist values) affects the corporate way of doing things. In another example, the GLC sales manager talks about how he needs to change his way of speech when addressing an older and 'old fashioned' client:

> "Listen, tell you one thing. Sometimes, we just got to play the game right. This is Singapore. Still very Chinese. Oh my goodness. I also deal with China people. All same. They older, they want respect. We sales, want to sell, of course say what they want to hear. No point killing your own chickens for nothing, right?
>
> (Teo, Sales Manager, GLC)

He then makes a comparison with other colleagues' experiences with non-Chinese clients. This gives a direct contrast and reflects the difference of their approach when dealing with different clients. This cultural difference is not only acknowledged within the workplace, but delegation of tasks is also distributed according to the ability to integrate such cultural awareness in the corporate environment, and hence shapes the corporate culture in the workplace.

> "Sometimes, the other team more lucky and no need to put on a show. The Australians are more *shuang kuai* (Mandarin: straightforward). You say what you mean. I think it is good but it won't work for my team. That's why I got all the Chinese clients! [laughs] I think that's my good sales experience. I don't mind. Keeps my parents, wife, children happy!
>
> (Teo, Sales Manager, GLC)

This hierarchical configuration in society is highly structured and is also explicitly represented in the corporate environment. The hierarchical aspect can be seen from the top-down flow of command and also through bottom-up interactions. Mel expects her department to live-up to her expectations and carry out the way of doing things

that she thinks is right. Amy looks up to Mel and tries to do her best. This creates a style of dealing with older clients and employees.

This section has illustrated how the junior-senior and ruler-subject roles are played out and how they symbolise power relations within the workplace. They have a direct impact on the practices of the individuals in the corporate environment. The obedient (and submissive) attitude is seen as 'good' Confucian value, and practices out of this conformity can be seen as Westernised and lacking in Confucian values. These Confucian values have a direct influence on how they treat their fellow colleagues and this becomes a routinised practice at the workplace, and affects 'how things are done here'. This feature of Confucian values allows us to have a deeper insight into the minds of the individual in such a society. The following aspects of Confucian values continue to add onto the greater understanding of how such cultural characteristics essentially affect corporate culture.

7.2.2   Husband and Wife: Patriarchal and Sexist?

In this section, I examine the husband-and-wife relationship in the context of Confucian values, and how it is represented in the corporate environment. I demonstrate how the use of this metaphor is prevalent in a patriarchal society such as Singapore, and how it is accepted and (re)produced in the corporate workplace.

Dan is the sales director of a SME and also has past experience as a senior sales manager at a GLC. He is in a senior management position and he exudes a certain confidence, and is able to provide me with in-depth answers to my questions. This shows his ease with sharing his personal opinions with another male. He obviously

does not think his opinions can be treated as sexist. The following quote started with a conversation on customer service in Asia, and it moved on to his opinion of teamwork. He uses the husband-and-wife metaphor to compare and illustrate how he mixes the strength and weaknesses of his members to form the optimal team combination.

> "I tell you, no matter what you do, customers always king. In Japan, customers are god. In Singapore, I joke-joke and tell my team they are like your wife! No, no. This is serious. Whatever they say, always say yes and see what can be done about it... but to be fair, serious now, [leans forward] my department and team works very well. I know them all very well and I try to match-make the best team. They are just like a happy couple team. The girl no longer stay in kitchen and listen to hubby. I jumble up my team so they form the best formation. I also swap them around when necessary. It's all very easy but I must look out for them. Must *gan gan* (Mandarin: aggressive) then can get the deal. Nowadays, so competitive."

> (Dan, Sales Director, SME)

In Dan's sales department, there are five teams in total. Some teams consist of four members and some consist of two. The members are rotated around according to the demands of the project. In the above quote, he demonstrates how the company's attempt to stay competitive, with use of the traditional husband-and-wife metaphor. In this context, the allegory used reflects how traditional attitudes are being played out in the contemporary workplace. This is an example how he uses Confucian value metaphors to manage his, mixing the weaker individuals with the stronger individuals. There are no set rules, and he adapts his business strategy according to the type of resources available to him. The example reflects how the conservative attitude towards men and women in the Confucian context is (re)created in the corporate workplace. The decision-making process includes Confucian values, and is a routine

for this particular director of a SME. Hence, the corporate culture here is directly influenced by Confucian values.

The next quote exemplifies the use of husband-and-wife metaphor to motivate employees. Hiang, a market analyst at the GLC says;

> "It's almost like the director is the hubby and the number two, his wife. *Zui jia pai dang* (Mandarin: best couple team). And [breaks into laughter] all the department *towkays* (Hokkien: boss) are his concubines! Simple but just like good old days. I know this is just *gila gila* (Malayu: crazy) talking but I think you know what I mean. Deep down inside, we all know what's best for the company. So, might as well follow and put your best foot forward, *tio bo* (Hokkien: isn't it)?
>
> (Hiang, Market Analyst, GLC)

In the above quote, Hiang refers to the imperial Chinese era and compares it to the structure of the company; cultural history still plays a role in the minds of corporate players. In this context, the term 'concubine' is part of popular culture and is a common term used in the television costume soap drama serials. Whatever myths or stories are used, it is still in the interest of the company to achieve the most productive target. All these myths, rituals and stories (see chapter 2) are shaped by the local cultural characteristics, and conjure a familiar and specific atmosphere at the corporate place and shape the corporate culture. The different cultural myths and stories used here reflect what the contemporary society accepts as 'norms'. These 'norms' are then reflected in the formation of corporate culture. In the above two examples, the use of husband-and-wife and concubine metaphors are seen as accepted norms in society and popular culture and were used in the corporate workplace. This clearly shows how this aspect of cultural stories and Confucian values are part of the process of (re)producing corporate culture.

227

7.2.3 Comradeship: Brotherhood and Sisterhood

Comradeship was one of the key themes that emerged from the fieldwork; looking out for close relations and helping others were explicitly articulated at the various companies. From the perspective of the corporate organisations, there was a sense of comradeship and responsibility as part of civil society. On the individual level, there was a sense of responsibility to support 'brothers and sisters' at the workplace. This attitude and behaviour stems from Confucian values, and is explicitly expressed at the workplace. The following quotes show how this is being displayed as part of the corporate culture.

> "Yes, this award is for our contributions to the National Kidney Foundation. Of course doing charity is part of our company policy... It's our culture here, you know. Actually, there's no need but it's good for society. We are in the position to help out. So, why not? It's nothing much... We are one big family, got to help our brothers and sisters. Not good to see them suffer, right?"
>
> (Chua, Creative Director, SME)

Chua explicitly says that it is part of the company's practice and culture to make charitable contributions. The reason for this action is goodwill and responsibilities to the extended 'family' in society.

> "Oh, it's for society. It's part of our tradition and culture. Do a bit of good when we can is right."
>
> (Tay, Accounts Manager, SME)

In the above quote, Tay reinforces the notion of a socially responsible individual and company. The rationale is not just for corporate social responsibility purposes, but also a culturally-oriented reason. The following quotes reinforce the theme of

Confucian comradeship and being a socially responsible company. The interviewees (from SME, GLC and MNC) provide explanations as to why their companies are involved in charitable work. One of the reasons is how society must be cohesive and everyone should look out for one another, just as depicted in Confucian values.

> "All these awards? Charity types. Let's put it this way. We help them when we can. Hopefully, we won't be in their position one day but if we are, we hope someone will help us too. It is good for them, good for our reputation and good feeling for our staff. We are a caring company."

> (Tan, Creative Director, SME)

Tan was explaining the background of all the awards and certificates displayed along the public corridor leading to the office. They are there to prompt the staff about how they should look out for one another. They are also there to remind the employees that the company is involved in charity work, and looking out for other members of the community. This fosters a sense of comradeship within the corporate environment.

> "I guess this is part of society. We try to help one another out whenever we can. May not be much but a little is better than nothing."

> (Steve, Manager, MNC)

Steve gave a similar but shorter response to the one given by Tan. Steve suggests that it is important to help one another and the amount involved is not important. This suggests the symbolic gesture has far more significance than the material reality.

> "Actually, we're one big family. No matter what others say, this is still home and if we don't help our own, who will?"

> (Peter, Marketing Director, GLC)

Peter's response is a classic Confucian approach to comradeship. The society is seen as one big family. The symbolism in this comradeship is extended from the social context to the corporate workplace. All the quotes above shows the theme of

"*Xiong di shu zhi, xu fen duo run gua* (Among brothers and close relations, the more affluent should help the needy."

(Maxims by Zhu Zi, translated by Wu, 1998, p. 75)

This is shown in the actions taken by SME, GLC and MNC. Their corporate culture has been directly influenced by this Confucian value. The senior management often talk about looking out for the partner companies, clients and fellow colleagues using such cultural references. Those who are in higher management positions often motivate their member of staff with the concept of:

"*Jia men he shun, sui yong sun bu ji, yi you yu huan* (When a family lives together in harmony and peace, even if they are poor and can hardly make ends meet, they will enjoy plenty of happiness."

(Maxims by Zhu Zi, translated by Wu, 1998, p. 183)

For example, Eugene says the following during a team motivational meeting just before they start on a new bidding project:

"Come on guys. We are all in this together. *You nan tong dang you fu tong xiang* (Mandarin: going through thick and thin together). Let's do it. This is a big one. Think of your family. I'm sure you are all happy but imagine all the extra they can have!... Let's get down to work."

(Eugene, Senior Marketing Manager, SME)

The use of the family and friendships to motivate his team shows the close connection between individuals and other relationships. The term 'family' encompasses the immediate blood family, and also the greater (business) community (see Hsing, 1996, 2003). This is a significant symbolic representation of how close and united the

230

society should be. This also displays the extent to which how 'family' is perceived in the Chinese community (Sia, 2005). The approval and endorsement from the community (immediate and extended family) is of importance to their work attitude and performance (Luo, 2007). The way they portray their motivation is a clear example how this comradeship affects corporate culture. In the following example, Jennifer tries to explain how personal satisfaction is not the motivating drive for her working ethos. Instead, being able to reward her family is paramount. She extends this attitude to her colleagues and team mates;

> "Let's face it. Rich or poor, we still got to live. We are still happy. But why stay poor and happy when you can be rich and happy? I mean, you know what I mean? No need to be super rich but at least more than comfortable. It's very nice when you can bless your close ones with nice gifts. No need to eat abalone[17] all time but also no need to only eat in hawker centre all the time. That's what I tell my team. We always exceed our targets."
>
> (Jennifer, Senior Marketing Manager, MNC)

This is a clear motivation for her work ethos. She is one of the high flyers in the company and together with her team, reaches her targets in good time. But she also expresses caution on the following theme;

> "Carrying out anything for personal profit will mostly bring about hatred and bitterness."
>
> (Confucius on Virtue, cited in Sia, 2005, p. 156)

Jennifer says,

> "But it's also important not to lose track of one's position. We are not the put fire and steal type. It's all legal and fair. Money can only do so much. I keep reminding myself and my team not to lose track. That's what's nice about my team. We are same frequency... sometimes you need to throw a brick at someone before they know when to slow down and appreciate and learn. So sad right?"
>
> (Jennifer, Senior Marketing Manager, MNC)

---

[17] A variety of shellfish. A local delicacy that is expensive and reflects wealth of consumer.

This clearly sets out her style of working, and the type of corporate culture she is creating or maintaining within her team. She wants her team to do well but does not want them to be only working for personal profit, but also for the benefit of the community. This notion of comradeship is clearly illustrated by Jennifer. She continues the conversation later on how not to be over ambitious and forget about learning in order to upgrade oneself for the good of the community and it exemplifies the following;

> "A gentlemen does not seek to satiate his appetite or demand luxurious trappings. He is efficient at work, and cautious when speaking; he corrects himself by learning from the accomplished and virtuous. These are the attributes which mark him out to be a keen learner."

> (Confucius on Learning, cited in Sia, 2005, p. 28)

The following quote follows on the notion of learning and upgrading oneself not just for the individual's sake but for the benefit of the family (and community). Eileen, the HR manager of a GLC says;

> "We in HR are never too tired to learn. You meet new people everyday. They bring old information and new things. There's always something I can learn. This is good for all of us."

The modesty of Eileen as HR manager sets the tone for learning in her department. Her cultural traits and educational background hugely influence her colleagues as they all look up to her, and believe in her working ethos. This reflects on how Confucian values have impacted Eileen, and how she has direct affects on the corporate culture in her working environment.

"You have a bad day? Go see Eileen. But make sure it a defo bad issue. Don't waste her precious time. She's too good to waste time on small flies."

(Soh, Assistant Manager, GLC)

The close comradeship, fostered by Confucian values, is not only reflected in social relationships but also in corporate relationships. The emphasis on other relationships as the wider component of the family unit is very strong in the data collected. The constant use of the family and improving oneself for the greater good of the family (immediate, blood or extended) is a driving force in the corporate environment. This clearly indicates the direct power Confucian values have on the development of corporate culture.

Despite the variations of popular culture within modern societies, there is an underlying commonality in the national manifestations of Confucianism in Singapore. The societal outlook is still heavily hierarchical, patriarchal and family-oriented. Here, I must emphasise again that the notion of the family extends to the extensive family unit, and also encompasses the whole nation. The underlying humanism of this ethos is demonstrated in an edict that was promulgated in the eleventh century, and is still very much propagated today:

> "The father should be righteous.
> The elder brother should have brotherly love and care for his younger brother.
> The younger brother should be respectful.
> The son should be filial and serve his parents.
> Husband and wife should have a sense of obligation to each other.
> There must be a distinction between man and woman.
> Children should study.
> Children should be able to understand ritual decorum, rightness, integrity and shame..."

(cited in de Bary, 1998, pp. 74 -75)

The web of relationships being invoked in this passage has oppressive and restrictive qualities (Barr, 2002). The suggested relationships may form the 'glue' to the functioning of society, but some aspects are deemed as outmoded, and must require further interpretations to avoid mindless submission. The 'sexism' mirrors the reality of the hierarchical and patriarchal society and is 'tolerated' by the wider business community and corporate rituals. The web of relationships depicted as part of Confucian teachings and values plays an active part in the shaping of corporate culture.

Confucianism is part of the general conceptualisation of Asian values, but with its own distinctive and metaphysical story. Confucianism has also changed and adapted to the development of society and this can be shown in how it is used in a modern corporate workplace. In the corporate environment, Confucianism and Asian values are deliberately used as mechanisms to motivate the workforce. It reflects the contemporariness of such cultural characteristics in a rapidly evolving corporate environment. The whole process is also an illustration of how the myths, stories, rituals, and embedded practices in society are being (re)produced in the corporate workplace, creating a distinctive corporate culture that is unique to society. In the next section, I discuss another aspect of Chinese cultural characteristics – *guanxi* (interpersonal relationship) – and how it impacts corporate culture.

7.3 *Guanxi*

One of the most important concepts in Chinese business is *guanxi*. It facilitates and connects millions of Chinese firms into a social and business web (see Seligman, 1999; Yeung 2004; Luo, 2007). As a Chinese business networking concept, it can be highly elusive. Technically, *guanxi* stands for any type of relationship or ties that

come in together to support one another. Furthermore, in the corporate field, this relationship includes exchanging favours on a regular and voluntary basis (Luo, 2007). However, this practice may sometimes involve corruption (see Chua *et al*, 2009). Nonetheless, many managers in my fieldwork often talk about *"wo men yao da hao guanxi"* (we must establish good *guanxi*). Establishing and maintaining the right *guanxi* does not necessarily ensure success but it certainly facilitates the way to success. There are also inevitable risks and barriers, which I will illustrate further on in this section. Developing and nurturing *guanxi* also takes time and resources. Successful and strong *guanxi* can (in)directly link one to new acquaintances and information resources. Today, in a fast-paced corporate environment, *guanxi*, has become more entrenched than ever, heavily influencing political landscapes, social behaviour and business practices (Seligman, 1999; Luo, 2007). It shapes how 'things are done' both outside and within the workplace.

There is a body of literature on *guanxi* and Chinese business practices (see Amber *et al*, 2009; Luo, 2007). However, there is no literature on how *guanxi* can affect corporate culture. The Chinese and Western cultures of conducting business can sometimes be different, even though the transactions seem identical (see Seligman, 1999; Yeung, 2004; Tan, 2004; Buderi and Huang 2004). The strength of the ties and trust are extended between companies and also between individuals. *Guanxi* can take on several forms. It is legal, based on exchange and strengthening of relationships, and not necessarily based on money. Goodwill, trust and reciprocity foster strong *guanxi* at both the corporate and individual level. According to Luo (2007), *guanxi* has four features. Firstly, it is multi-level. On the macro-level, it involves family, community and society. On the firm level, it involves the managerial policy, business practices,

235

marketing combinations, organisational behaviour, human resource administration, corporate strategy and corporate culture. At the micro-level (individual), it relates to interpersonal relations, social status and kinship connections. Secondly, *guanxi* has to be understood within context of the political, social and economic history, and background of the participants and region. Thirdly, *guanxi* is integrative. So, to appreciate *guanxi* fully, one needs to inter-relate the connections and complexities of the various components. Finally, *guanxi* is practice-oriented and continuously develops according to the surroundings.

In the following extract from an interview, I discuss how having established *guanxi* with military ranked individuals can be helpful in the Singaporean corporate environment. Martin is a sales manager at a GLC. He talks about his experience of *guanxi* and how it helps him at work.

Martin: Shong and I go back a long time. So many years already. We still see one another from time to time. So luck that we are in the same industry. He very powerful link. But don't get me wrong. It's all good stuff. [laughs] He help me a lot and I also think I help him too.

Raye: Ok. That's interesting. Can you elaborate a little more on this?

Martin: Oh, that time, in the very last minute have to broker a deal but not sure what some of the costings were. He just sms me the figures after a few minutes. I mean, it is not trade secret or anything like that. It just makes things faster and easier. Some more, we also not in the same company or rival company. It is very healthy. We help one another, special *guanxi*, right?"

Raye: Do you have such similar special *guanxi* with other people? And how does *guanxi* affect corporate culture?

236

Martin: I think have. But not so special like Shong. Old school friends, sometimes but when you don't have that past with them, it is less strong. Of course you have to put in the hard work in yourself. All the right *guanxi* also cannot help you if you sit down there and do nothing. *Guanxi* is very hard to describe as it is so special. It really helps make better work life whether they (*guanxi*) are in or outside the company.

This example reflects the degree of benefit that the sales manager derives from a long standing relationship. Martin was able to rely on a long-term personal and business relationship to facilitate the completion of a business transaction. The availability of that link was crucial in providing the additional advantage to his work efficiency. This special connectivity is repeatedly illustrated through the stories of my interviewees.

Emily, a senior marketing manager at a GLC, often talks of her connections with an ex-colleague, a senior marketing manager (Jennifer) in a MNC. They regularly call one another for advice and support in their work as well as social issues.

> "Jennifer is so reliable. She is like my big sister. She used to look out for me when we used to work together. I'm of course sad when she left but it is good for her. You know, when you work together, you spend more time with your colleagues than with your hubby. That's what my *lao gong* (Mandarin: husband) complains. He's lucky as he's 9 to 5 job not like me. Marketing side is very aggressive kind. Sometimes, we travel a lot too, you know?"
>
> (Emily, Senior Marketing Manager, GLC)

When asked to give further examples of how that connection with Jennifer helps her in her work and social life, she says

> "As I said, she's like my older sis, not just another friend. Married life she's also one of a kind. In fact, you can ask around. Many people like to buy her coffee and ask for home advice. She's just very good and very soothing type. As for work, she really taught me the ropes here. But even if she's working another company now, she's only a phone call away. I tell you, friends like

that, hard to come by and you really keep them. I wanted her to be the godmother for my little girl but my hubby wants his own sister. Better don't fight on this one. [laughs] We meet up still for girly time. Not as often as I like but we make the effort. Actually, to tell you the truth, she also gives me some *lobang* (Malayu: opportunities). [whispers] Don't tell others, ok? She referred me to a job, a promotion actually. But after thinking about it and discussing with my department boss, I hang on here for few more years before I move around. So you see, she's really good right? That's why she's doing so well over there."

Interpersonal relationships in this example are not only beneficial within the workplace, but also on a personal level. This support at work and personal life help shape and influence the performance of Emily at her present company. Her adoration and interaction with Jennifer directly influences the way she behaves at work, and moulds the way she carries herself at the workplace. This is evidence of how the connections between firms (MNC and GLC) can affect corporate culture. The ongoing networks of social relation (Yeung, 1994) illustrated in this example is also reflected in many of the participants in the fieldwork. These embedded characteristics affect the way in which they carry out their daily 'corporate routines', and hence impacting the formation of corporate culture.

The returns of creating and establishing a strong *guanxi* is worth the time and monetary investment (Ambler *et al*, 2009). The returns in favours far outstrip the investment. Sometimes, the favours are simply inaccessible to people who do not have that *guanxi* (Luo, 2007). Whilst the practices of *guanxi* may sometimes be seen as intrusive, it is a very acceptable part of doing business even in a 'Westernised' corporate atmosphere. Taking part in this practice is central to Chinese commercial activity and this highlights the hybridisation of the corporate culture, and Chinese capitalism in Singapore. Some contacts are made through ethnic ties. Being able to

speak a certain dialect and be part of a dialect association or clan can sometimes provide invaluable business and personal opportunities.

In this example, Jessie relates her story about her childhood experience with a Hokkien Clan.

> "I'm sure you also heard of scholarship from your TeoChew Clan, right? Yes, my parents made me join mine. It's quite easy. You just need to get As and you get some money. And you only need to show your face few times a year. I think for youngsters nowadays, it is old fashioned but my days, it was really prestigious! [chuckles] Does the money stretch far? Not really but you make lots of friends there. Now, I sometimes go for their meetings. It's all voluntary but it is good for my business. You never know what that special break till it happens... I want to venture[18] into China one day and this is definitely my chance.

In the above quote, Jessie tells of how she was encouraged to be part of the Hokkien Clan. It was seen as prestigious when she was younger as it meant that she collects a monetary reward for doing well in the studies. Her relationship with the clan has changed, and she now maintains the *guanxi* to further enhance her business network. It is like a loyalty club membership based on belonging to the same dialect (see Yeung, 2004). She also acknowledges that the clan is her most reliable way of entering China's market. When I asked her how corporate culture is affected by such links with clans and dialect associations, she says

> "It depends on the generation business. The older you are, you are more stuck in those ways and don't even dream of changing. But the young ones that come along and win the old ones over, they are the one to watch out for. People like us can make the changes but it takes time. You cannot make quick changes overnight. But it is still important to keep those old traditions. *This is business but this is also people.* [emphasis added] It is always two ways."
>
> (Jessie, Manager, SME)

---

[18] Refers to business ventures

239

Jessie gives examples of how ethnic ties can boost economic relations, and it can also affect corporate culture. The clans and dialect associations are seen as old fashioned as they were founded by people who are now in their 70s. However, new businesses are seeking assistance from such associations to help them make the necessary links with other businesses and the clan has also modernised. The survival of the clan depends on the membership and the business contacts they keep. So, in order to utilise fully the corporate development and the survival of the clan, the business practices have to be kept updated, and remain attractive to newer members such as Jessie. Establishing good *guanxi* is important in the corporate environment, especially in a predominantly Chinese society. This facilitator of smoother corporate activities is openly acknowledged and celebrated. In the process, corporate culture is shaped by how these individuals go about establishing and maintaining good and strong *guanxi*.

7.4 *Mianzi*

Another important concept in the Chinese culture is *mianzi*, which means 'face'. *Mianzi* is a fragile commodity amongst the Chinese community (Seligman, 1999). Failing to treat someone with proper respect causes one to 'lose face'. Although it is an abstract concept, *mianzi* is a serious aspect of business practice. A public chastisement or similar affront results in a 'loss of face'. However, the boundaries can sometimes be blurred. A simple contradiction to someone's (especially someone in a senior rank) opinion or even declining an invitation can result in a 'loss of face'. Decline can be treated as rejection and leads to loss of faith and face, which is seen as rude, offensive and damaging *guanxi*.

> "Chinese spend far more time thinking about face, and see its relevance in far more situations, than foreigners do. Chinese can be counted on to view their

human interactions through the lens of face; each and every one represents an opportunity to give, receive, save, or lose *mianzi*."

(Seligman, 1999, p. 210)

Things that make others look up to you, or be envious of you, also confer face on you. Things that build the ego give face. Doing a favour for a stranger who is introduced to you by a close friend confers *mianzi* on the introducer. Praising someone to his or her boss is also 'face-enhancing'. In the following extract of an interview, Arthur, deputy director of a MNC, gives talks about the importance of *mianzi* in the corporate environment.

Arthur: *Mianzi*? It's something we cannot describe but everyone knows what it mean. Give face or not give face. This is very important. Even I have to give face not only to my boss but also my team. This is important for them, and not just from them to me.

Raye: Yes, I do understand. Can you give one or two specific examples that happened recently that you have to give face and someone else give face to you?

Arthur: Of course. Last weekend, I was invited to Ah Xiong's baby boy *man yue* (Mandarin: a baby's one month celebration). Actually, I have another commitment but Ah Xiong works really hard for me in the last two years and I know it is important for him that I go. It is also giving his parents and his wife face, right? I mean, Ah Xiong had to spend Christmas and his birthday away from home last year so we can close this deal in Shenzhen. So, I rushed there and then rushed to my other appointment. Ok, someone give me face? Easy. I ask the guys to get me coffee. They take turns to buy coffee for one another in a team but I always miss out. So, we joke around on this one as if they don't like me or what. Just to tease them. I also buy them rounds too. I am sure they also give you face the next time I ask them to buy coffee for you on my behalf [chuckles].

Raye: Thanks. So, does *mianzi* have any effect on corporate culture?

Arthur: That's a good one. I think in Singapore, in Chinese clients, especially those China ones, extremely important. You make friends first then do business. You establish *guanxi* first then talk money. You must give face until the Buddha appears and they then trust you. Sometimes it is a very long process but in business, this is worth it. You are not just giving face to yourself, your clients but you are representing your company and you are giving face to your money tree!

In this example, Arthur has explained clearly the importance of *mianzi* and its importance in the workplace. It is a business and personal practice that helps lubricate the relationships between colleagues and business partners. The impact on corporate culture is also significant. It changes the way in which businesses deals are negotiated and processed. Arthur talks about establishing trust between business trusts before the actual negotiations take place. This is also reflected in the GLC. Emily, a senior marketing manager at a GLC, says:

> "*Mianzi* is so important nowadays. This especially for our overseas clients. Not just the China business group but also the Indonesians and Thais. If they get fed up with you, it means you have not given them enough face. Sometimes, you know you all want to make good money. The deciding vote is which bidder gave the most face. Sometimes, it is easier to work with our Aussie or American clients. So much more straightforward. No need for all these *wayang* (Malay: puppet show)."

> (Emily, Senior Marketing Manager, GLC)

The above extract clearly shows that *mianzi* is a Chinese and Asian concept. It is important in the corporate environment as it can affect a potential successful business partnership. Furthermore, it appears to be a concept that is not as applicable to Western business clients. The following extract of a conversation with Dan, sales director of a SME, talks about similar implications of *mianzi* and its impact on corporate culture.

Raye: So, is *mianzi* important in your area of work?

Dan: Usually yes, especially if they are old customers that we have a good relationship with. You have to give face, make sure the New Year hampers appear in good time. They have to be invited to our company functions. You can't invite one and not the other. They will find out. This industry is very small, everybody knows everybody.

Raye: What about the younger colleagues? Do you think *mianzi* is an important aspect for them?

Dan: *Mianzi* is everywhere. If you are a local, or even from neighbouring countries, you know what this is. It is even bigger and more important in China. We are not just talking about table manners, handshakes, who to pour tea first. We are talking about making big businesses.

In the above interview with Dan, it is apparent that *mianzi* goes deeper than superficial social etiquettes. It forms a core meaning in the way people interact with one another. The practice of giving *mianzi* is also incorporated in business, especially when SME companies are dealing with Chinese clients. Such embedded social practices are significant for shaping the way the employees carry out their business activities, thereby affecting corporate culture. In the next section, I discuss how education and country club memberships can affect the moulding of corporate culture.

7.5   Education and Country Club Memberships Matter

According to Waters (2006), there are multiple meanings (symbolic and material) and consequences of attaining 'overseas' education for Chinese students and their families moving between Hong Kong and Canada. There are also symbolic distinctions of 'international education' amongst middle-class Chinese families in their pursuit to accumulate different forms of capital – social, cultural and economic (see Mitchell, 1997; Ong and Nonini 1997; Ong 1999). Furthermore, Ong (1999, p. 90) describes a 'Western university degree' as 'the ultimate symbolic capital necessary for global

mobility' for middle-class Chinese in many Asian countries. In this section, I examine how the (overseas) educational experiences of individuals can contribute to the formation of corporate culture. Attaining an overseas education is seen as a privilege. However, there is a stereotype that although overseas educated individuals have an 'extra edge' over those educated locally, the former have diluted Confucius and Asian values. There is also an amount of tension and competition at the workplace between those who have overseas education and those who have been educated in Singapore. Those who are overseas educated can be stereotyped as 'less Asian' or 'less Chinese' due to their ability to speak fluent English. However, those who are bicultural and bilingual are seen as ideal citizens (see chapter 7). The following quotes are taken from various interviews with the HR managers and directors from the GLC, MNC and SME companies.

Raye: Are there any major differences between those who are educated here or overseas?

"I think it depends. We have many graduates from UK, Australia and America. There's not much difference as long as they can perform. A mixture is good. We put them according to the needs of the job. I give you example. Of course, you won't put someone who cannot speak Chinese in the China sales department. But those who can speak Chinese well and those who have overseas education are all welcome here. I think it is getting the right mixture... Oh, as for their attitude. Again, you get both. We also have in-house training as I trust all of them to perform well, doesn't really matter where they come from."

(Eileen, HR Manager, GLC)

"I can tell you. Those from overseas, yes they work very well but sometimes they so alien. One day, they can really forget where they come from. I think especially when they first step off the plane! [laughs] We need to send them to a Singaporean conversion course. Too many french fries and big mac.

(Soh, Senior Manager, GLC)

244

From the above two extracts of interviews, it shows that there is a difference is attitude towards the educational background of potential employees. Eileen is probably giving the 'official' reply and what is deemed as politically correct opinion from any HR department. However, she did mention language ability to be an added bonus for the potential employee.

Raye: What about those who are educated overseas?

"Of course there is a difference. We are more daring and more open. The locals are very scared of everything. But this is also good. Too much noise is not so good especially when you want to get things done. Too many chefs spoil the soup, right? If my team got too many Indian chiefs, I also headache. But at the end of the day, both all work well. It depends on the job and sometimes one is better for specific jobs... For example, those who got the head for *zou lang* (Hokkien: being streetwise) will be better at dealing with some type of people. Those who can handle big situations, locals or overseas, as long as job is done, that's it. But I have to say in my field. The experience is a plus. My project and events managers are mostly from overseas because they know who to deal with those Aussies. The chance is even and open. Those who can achieve will get it. As simple as that. The more dynamic you are, the better. And you also learn on the go."

(Arthur, Deputy Director, MNC)

"[laughs] I would like to say it's all equal but you really have to look at each individual situation. This is an American company based in Singapore. Of course we have to employ Singaporeans. But depends on the job they do. Those that affect the profile of our name, they've got to be house trained anyway. So, the more experience you have, the better. As you know, the market is moving towards India and China. I know we're heading that way. But it doesn't mean that education background is the only deciding factor. But the overseas one, from my experience seems to be more dynamic."

(Smitha, HR Manager, MNC)

From the above extracts of the interviews, it appears that there is no preference for employing those with an overseas education. However, they later reveal that it is those who are more adaptable to the company's working practices are preferred. Hence,

245

those who had an overseas education are preferred because of the overall experience they bring to the workplace. According to Mitchell (1997), overseas education symbolizes the possession beyond just a credential. Having an overseas education also encompasses a whole multitude of cultural, embodied traits conducive to professional success in a global economic arena (see also Waters, 2008). The personal traits of these individuals (with overseas education experience) are part of the consideration for hiring practices. Although it is not explicit that overseas graduate are preferred, it is implicit that their overall education experience are preferred by the MNC employers. The following quotes examine the perception of hiring individuals with overseas education in SMEs.

Raye: Do you prefer locally educated people to work for a company like yours?

> "Well, I do have more locals working here but it also depends on what type of overseas guys they are. I don't like to put them in boxes so fast. We are in creative side of the industry. Our designers are mostly from overseas. So, depends on the job, I think."
>
> (Mel, HR Manager, SME)

> "Whoever gives the best balance gets the job. I enjoy working with both. Yes, there is difference but sometimes this is good for the specific job. I cannot imagine the *ang mo ang mo* (Hokkien: Westernised) type to go and deal with my local small businesses. It's like one chicken one duck. How to communicate? [laughs]
>
> (Tan, Director, SME)

In this SME, it is clear that local workers are preferred due to their ability to connect and understand their base clients. Their embedded 'localness' fits in with the routine business activities of the SME. This affects the way they behave and carry out their daily business activities. However, when work is related with the creative side of the

company, Mel implied that those from overseas have a more creative input. So, in GLC, SME and MNC companies that participated in this research, they all had reasons for employing local and overseas graduates for a variety of reasons. The characteristics associated with a local and overseas education are strategically utilised to 'fit' into the job description. Hence, this practice can be argued to shape 'how things are done here' at the workplace. Furthermore, when asked if their educational background makes any difference to Asian values? Lim says replies,

> "Of course! Nowadays, only know how to win win win. What happened to the respect and Asian values? Don't think they teach that in textbooks. All the physics and engineering. Same here or there."
>
> (Lim, Assistant Director, SME)

In this case, Lim suggests that her younger colleagues are now less 'Chinese' or 'Asian', due to the influence of a modern and Westernising society. The locality of their education does not necessarily play a part. The 'here' refers to being educated locally and the 'there' refers to having an overseas education. This suggests that the 'locals' (especially the younger generation) are modernising and becoming less 'Asian' or 'Chinese'. Distinct competition existed between the marketing managers. Part of the reason could be attributed to their educational background. The corporate world is a highly competitive field and employers use any reason to hire the best people for their team. The dynamics of two teams in the GLC company are discussed here. The teams are made up of marketing officers, marketing managers and marketing senior managers. The senior managers have influence over who they pick for their teams but it is ultimately up to the marketing director to select the individuals.

One team was headed by a locally educated manager (Steven) and the other team was headed by Tess who was educated overseas. They both talked about taking to the 'battlefield' in slightly different manners. The tension between the two teams was explicitly displayed in and outside the workplace. Tess is a 30 yr old Singaporean Chinese and she leads one of the teams. She was educated in a local 'convent' school (top 10% Special Stream) and has a University degree from a UK Russell Group University. She spoke and behaved in a style that a Singaporean would be able to tell that she had been educated in one of the top convent schools and had an overseas education; she exuded confidence, was well-spoken and smartly dressed (see also Ong, 1999). Her team mates felt privileged to be in her team and it was a more dynamic team as compared to a 'local' team headed by Steven. The following quote clearly display the sentiments,

> "I tell you, luckily I am in her team. She is just much better overall. She can multitask and handle the situation better. Not that I am telling you this but I've been in Steve's team before. Things are so slow there. Ok, he is good but over here, just a little better... But one thing that is nice about Tess is that she doesn't really show off. That's nice, right? We like to be in her team. (giggles)"
>
> (Angelina, Tess' Team Member, GLC)

Tess would 'dress to impress' and spoke in a professional non-Singlish manner (on the phone and to her colleagues). She refrained from using Singlish unless she was dealing with local clients or when necessary. She also has membership of a prestigious country club. This was given to her as a 21st birthday present from her parents. Thus, she had many other social activities that many Singaporeans are excluded from. It was also at these social events that she continued to extend and form new networks with

people from other industries. However, Tess' team members come from a diverse educational background.

Steven, the other team leader, is a 33 yr old Singaporean Chinese. He received his primary and secondary education from a government school and went to a local University. He spoke and behaved in a manner that many people such as Tess would label him as *ching cheong* (Hokkien: traditional Chinese). His attire is 'normal' and uses Singlish most of the time. His team mates were also more relaxed in what they wear. From the language he used to describe Tess, he was sometimes perceived as scornful and resentful, for example, he might have said,

"*aiya*, not depend on your own two hands[19], what's the point?"

In the corporate place, there was a marked divide between those who have attained overseas higher education and those who went to local universities. Nonetheless, both teams had a mix of both locally and overseas educated people. However, the team led by Tess has in the past tended to do better than the Steven's team and this added to tension and competition. When a new project appears, individuals with the most potential were selected in the hope that they would secure the bid. Usually, the senior managers would allocate the team members to the team managers but a team manager would also have an influence on whom they prefer. The marketing director makes the final decision. Although Tess might get on better with someone socially from a similar background, she would not hesitate to have someone who she did not get on well socially but had great potential and ability. Steven would also adopt the same practice. Also, despite their personal differences, they were still able to come together as two

---

[19] He is referring to Tess privileged family background that has given her a head start in the property market.

teams when dealing with larger projects. It was also interesting to see how the upper management interacted with both groups. Steven would be his normal self and behaved as if he was talking to a senior army officer. Tess would, in Steven's opinion, put on a front and put effort to try to reach to her division head's manner of talking, like talking to an army Major. According to Steven, despite the different education background, the individuals do work together as one. He says,

> "Yes, whatever your background, your boss is still your boss, right? This is Singapore, we are equal society and everyone is professional here. So, put any difference aside and just hit the targets. Simple, job done"

However, this can be contradictory and it affects the 'way things are done here'. The dynamics of the team depended on the team members. When asked about the hiring practices of the company, Eileen, the HR director maintained that there was no preferential treatment for people who were trained locally or overseas. They both have equal chances in the hiring process. However, when asked about who the individuals prefer to work with, there were mixed responses.

> "Of course, the *ang mo-fied* (Hokkien: Westernised) ones think they better. But depends. Sometimes they really know something that we don't but as long as they don't too *hao lian* (Hokkien: arrogant), we can accept them in the team. Just keep it professional."
>
> (Steven, Marketing Manager, GLC)

> "Actually, the best team will be both local and overseas grads. You know what our father (referring to Lee Kuan Yew) say right? Adapt is the only way forward. So, all Singaporeans at the end of the day. No need for internal conflict. We just go out there and get the work done. Simple... Nowadays, so competitive, if we don't diversify and adapt, we will so sink."
>
> (Eugene, Business Development Manager, GLC)

Eugene was also referring to the government's policy on foreign talent, and the constant reminder that both foreign talents and citizens are important for the growth of the local economy. The discussion in chapter 4 on the political economy of Singapore has highlighted the role of the state in the development of the economy. The effects of such an interventionist state are also seen in the corporate place. In addition, the cultural characteristics of Confucian and Asian values are clearly marked in the attitudes of the workers, thereby shaping the 'way things are done'.

> "Local people? No issue if they are not so narrow minded. Some are really good. Even better than myself sometimes. I really admire them. Only problem is when they don't understand where we are coming from and they simply label us a western 'ink'. And to be honest, not all the Singaporeans I know in my Aussie uni are successful now. Some of them are such a bum and I wouldn't want to work with them anyway. So, really depends. But on the whole, more experience better.... In my team, I don't have favourites, I treat them all the same..."
>
> (Eugene, Business Development Manager, GLC)

As Eugene has degrees from both Singapore and Australian Universities, he has a more open approach to people's educational background. He is able to move between the two sides, and offer further insights into how stereotyping such graduates can be misleading and inaccurate. In the following quote, Tess explains how the stereotyping of local and overseas graduates can be frustrating and inaccurate. She also offers a solution on how to reconcile such difficulties, illustrating how corporate culture can be affected by diverse educational experiences.

> "The *ching cheong* ones are so narrow minded. It is so much effort. I cannot relax with them. They are always trying to pick on me. But tell you what. I really get excited when they think they can beat my team. Not only because they think I've got western 'ink' and I might be inferior, they think as women, we cannot climb up in this field. I'm going to prove them wrong. I can wear trousers and skirts too... I don't mind my team having mixed group. As long as they don't betray me, it is fine. But easier if we speak the same lingo,

251

right? But this is out of my control, up to HR and the boss. I work with what I've got. Just keep it professional and use the best of the team's dynamics... This is our corporate culture, east meet west, right?"

(Tess, Marketing Manager, GLC)

The hiring practices in this company were consistent with my observations. There was a good mix of employees from a variety of educational backgrounds. As a result, there were both implicit and explicit tensions, and competition between the local and overseas graduates. This can also be seen in the team dynamics; people with similar backgrounds seem to group themselves together. This was reflected during lunchtime, coffee breaks and evening socials. The educational and economic background of those involved spans from the alumni, from high school to universities (local and overseas) and country club memberships. All these individual factors do affect the corporate culture. In the following excerpt from a semi-structured interview with Karen, a MNC manager, it clearly shows how differences in the individuals' educational background affect corporate culture.

Raye: In your opinion, are there any differences between those who studied overseas and those who studied locally?

Karen: Big difference. A lot of people are not open. You need to be exposed to a different culture to be able to adapt. You might not accept it but at least you know how to handle it...Locally trained people have narrower mindset. They are more money oriented. You bring it to my plate kind of attitude. I just do what I have to. Those trained overseas stretch a little further. Not just hardworking but just more motivated and have teamwork. It's more than just money. Yeah, more knowledge is important than desire for money and knowledge."

Raye: So, how does that affect corporate culture at your work environment?

Karen: Big time. The style is different. Usually, I would say that the more exposure to other cultures, the better it is. But then, some people get

252

really arrogant. Ok, it is nice to have extra education but at the end of the day, you must do your work properly. Then, it is the difference whether you can do it convincingly or not. Your style affect and change the mood of those around you. You may not notice but other people do. Moreover, it is always easier to work with someone with similar experience but this may not be so easy. So, you have to choose the right places to work but this may not be so easy too. That's life.

From my time spent with the three companies, it was quite obvious that those who are 'Westernised' tend to spend more time together and have a better or 'smoother' working relationship. These networks and 'group memberships' are also extended to those who come from similar class backgrounds. There were more topics in common to talk about and also similar experiences they could share. In fact, some of these common backgrounds (education and class) contributed to the development of a class of transnational professionals (Waters, 2007). This affects the way corporate culture is shaped through the interaction and relationships between such individuals.

There was a marked attitude towards club memberships. The majority of the workers did not belong to a country club. Some country clubs were for work purposes and some others were for recreational purposes for those who could afford it. The following quotes reflect the different usage of country club memberships. The country clubs becomes an extension of both social and corporate places to interact. These country clubs also becomes a site for (re)production sites for corporate culture.

> "Laguna club is really good for linking up. Even if you don't play golf, you can join the non-golf membership. Nowadays, you need to go that extra mile. Luckily, I like to play golf. And as you must know, a lot goes on in there!"

> (Daniel Tung, Marketing Director, SME)

In the above quote, Daniel Tung describes how the Laguna club is not only a prestigious golf club but also a place where important networking events take place. He stresses that it is worth making that extra effort and investment in joining either the gold or non-golf events for networking purposes. In the following quote, Smitha explains how the country club member can be used as an incentive in both personal and professional life. The club membership is a site for lubricating work relations:

> "Alan, when you get promoted, I'll make sure the company gets you one! Actually, my husband got a corporate one and we just use it for family use too. For mine, it is purely for work as the American club is too far from where we live. It's just for us to take some of our clients to talk business in a more relaxed place. They kind of like that."
>
> (Smitha, HR Manager, MNC)

However, there are a range of club memberships. The following two quotes reflect that there are tiers of status to the clubs. In this instance, it is a less prestigious and military affiliated country club. The materialistic reality of the society and the pressure to maintain *mianzi* amongst friends and family are all a part of the societal characteristics. Furthermore, these features are also diffused into the corporate workplace, in the pursuit of status amongst work colleagues.

> "True. I agree but where got chance to use? Throw money in to look good only. Don't want. Sometimes, too snobby. Why? You have? Where? Take us there? The only club I have is SAFRA (army-linked country club). We sometimes go there to eat and have ktv. That's about it, sometimes you get to meet your old time army mates there and have a quick catch up."
>
> (Elmas, Accounts Manager, MNC)

> "You know *lah*, Singaporeans very 'showy'. They like to put the country club sticker on their cars to show off at work... You see *lah*. You Singaporeans are very busy with materialistic things. Last time was the 5 Cs (credit cards, condominium, career, car, cash) and now how many Cs are there? 6? 7? You see the news? People struggling to pay off credit card bills and have to down

scale. So lose face! The poor children have to suffer with their parents. So high maintenance... So, of course can affect things at work. Sometimes, people have to pretend to be something they are not. "

<div align="right">(Moilin, Accounts Manager, MNC)</div>

Those who belonged to a country club were able to establish more contacts if they wanted to but there were also some members who were there for purely recreational purposes. However, it seemed that those who did have a country club membership belonged to a different status in society. Thus, club memberships not only facilitate business practices but it can also exclude those who do not belong within fairly restricted social circles with access to the most sought after country clubs.

There was a general sense of loyalty and comradeship between the people who came from similar schools. However, this did not necessarily equate to coming from the same school and can include the affiliated 'sister-brother' schools. Some of the groups are Raffles Institution and Raffles Girls School, Catholic High School and St Nicholas Girls School, Chinese High School and Nanyang Girls School, Anglo-Chinese School and Singapore Chinese Girls School. There was also a sense of kinship between the similar stream of educational system one comes from, such as those from the special and express stream as discussed earlier. People from the same school, affiliated schools or stream of education tend to have more in common with one another. They share similar extra-curriculum activities and participate in more exclusive sports such as canoeing, golf and tennis. They were also more likely to have family memberships to exclusive country clubs. All these attributes contributed to their 'way of doing things' not only on the social sphere but also at the workplace. The level of status, marked by educational backgrounds and country club memberships play a role in

affecting the corporate culture in the workplace. There is a significant emphasis on attaining an overseas education and higher education amongst the Chinese community and in Singapore (see Skeldon, 1997; Ong, 1999; Fan, 2003). Furthermore, achieving an overseas education is seen as desirable in order to reach the top of the socioeconomic ladder (see Mitchell, 1997; Beaverstock, 2002; Waters, 2008). This high priority accorded to attaining education, and as a route to upward social mobility, is also rooted in Confucianism (see Ong, 1999). This process has also led to the shift of attitudes, behaviour and practices at the workplace due to the individuals' personal experience and background and directly contributes as we have seen to the shaping and moulding of corporate culture. With its British colonial legacy, especially its attention to status and rank, Singapore has now mapped on to that legacy its own network and system for reproducing its elites in which schools, national service and country clubs all play a significant part both in respect to social and corporate life.

7.6   Conclusion

In this empirical chapter, I examined and analysed how Confucian and Asian values, education, *guanxi* and *mianzi* can affect the way in which corporate culture is shaped. I have demonstrated how social patterns, such as familialism, paternalism and personalism, derived from Confucian values are embedded in the Singapore society. These societal characteristics, together with the broader political and economic relations, contribute to the conditioning of the society and shaping of corporate culture in the workplace. In the corporate environment, Confucian and Asian values are deliberately used as mechanisms to motivate the workforce and ensure consensus and conformity to the hierarchy. It reflects the contemporaneity of such cultural characteristics in a rapidly evolving economy, demonstrating how the folklores and

stories embedded and practiced in society are being (re)produced in the corporate workplace, creating a distinctive corporate culture that is unique to the society.

The public endorsement of Confucian ethos by Mentor Minister Lee Kuan Yew reinforces the vital mechanics and the workings of the social order, reflecting the society's reliance and focus on Asian values and Confucianism. It is highly patriarchal and inherently conservative, and it advocates a social system that emphasises duty, loyalty, honour, filial piety, sincerity, respect for age and seniority. These traits remain valued amongst the Singapore society and can even be seen as a powerful driving force and in the way 'things are done' in family businesses (SMEs) and large companies (MNCs and GLCs). This hierarchical configuration in society is highly structured and is also explicitly represented in the corporate culture. From the empirical data, these characteristics are not just evident in the SMEs, as expected, but also very much present in modern and 'Westernised' MNCs. Hence, the inclusion of societal characteristics such as Confucian values must be incorporated in the conceptualisation of corporate culture.

The use of imaginary such as Chinese historical characters (emperors and empresses) reflects the significance of cultural myths and folklores in the individual's mind. The allusion to such imagery suggests an affectionate affiliation to their historical and cultural roots. Such Chinese cultural characteristics and historical stories are very much alive and being (re)enacted in the everyday lives of a modern (and Westernised) corporate environment. The use of the family and friendships to motivate teams shows the close connection between individuals and other relationships. The term 'family' encompasses the immediate blood family and also the greater (business) community

(see Hsing, 1996, 2003). This also displays the extent of how 'family' is perceived in the Chinese community (Sia, 2005). The approval and endorsement from the community (immediate and extended family) is of importance to their work attitude and performance (Luo, 2007). The way they portray their motivation is a clear example how this comradeship affects corporate culture. Such characteristics are illustrated in all the three companies. The stereotypical local SME company is expected to show traits of such characteristics at play in the workplace, but it is a also interesting to see how common such features are also existent in MNCs. Furthermore, it is also fascinating how such traits are used as dominant discourse in the GLC workplace. Consequently, cultural characteristics, stories and folklores are very much alive in the corporate place, thereby influencing how 'they do things'.

The cultivation of *guanxi* and *mianzi* is also imperative to daily business routines. *Guanxi* and *mianzi* are dominant characteristics in the social life of a multicultural Singaporean society, and the discussion in this chapter has illustrated that it has a significant impact on corporate culture. They are frequently used as a point of reference by the individuals in the workplace. *Guanxi* can facilitate and connect millions of Chinese firms into a social and business web (see Seligman, 1999; Yeung 2004; Luo, 2007). From the discussion on the collected data, I have shown that successful and strong *guanxi* can (in)directly link one to new acquaintances and information resources, shaping how 'things are done' both outside and within all the three companies. Whilst the practices of *guanxi* may sometimes be seen as intrusive, it is a very acceptable part of doing business even in a 'Westernised' corporate atmosphere (MNC). Taking part in this practice is central to Chinese commercial activity and this highlights the hybridisation of the corporate culture and Chinese

capitalism in Singapore. Some contacts are made through ethnic ties. Being able to speak a certain dialect and be part of a dialect association or clan can sometimes provide invaluable business and personal opportunities. Another important concept in the Chinese culture is *mianzi*, a fragile commodity amongst the Chinese community. Although it is an abstract concept (see Seligman, 1999), *mianzi* is a vital aspect of business and social practices. Furthermore, it appears to be a concept that is not so applicable to Western business clients, and hence giving the corporate culture a distinct ethnic character. The practice of giving *mianzi* is incorporated in business practices, as illustrated in all the three companies. Such embedded social practices are significant in shaping the way the employees carry out their business activities, thus affecting corporate culture.

In the quest for higher status and social mobility, education and class have also become features that affect corporate culture. In this chapter, I have shown how the (overseas) educational experiences of individuals can contribute to the shaping of corporate culture in all the three companies. The whole multitude of embodied and cultural characteristics of both local and overseas educated individuals provides the workplace with dynamic 'group memberships', thereby contribute to creating a distinctive corporate culture. The differences and similarities in educational background can even change the dynamics of the individuals and groups within the workplace. Hence, educational experiences of the individuals do affect the 'way they do things' in all the three different companies. Country clubs can become an extension of both social and corporate places to interact. The class status associated with such memberships of country clubs can affect the dynamics of social relations in all the three companies. These country clubs eventually become, in part an extension of the

corporation, both as a site for developing a business and also a further site for (re)production of corporate culture in terms of rewarding certain behaviour and achievements, and facilitating access to the movers and shakers. The conventions, the values and expectations which are generated in all these social spheres – including the officer corps of the SAF, the elite schools and the country clubs – all find their way into shaping and influencing corporate culture in Singapore.

Chapter 8

Conclusion: Place Matters

8.1   Introduction

The central argument of this thesis is that place matters to how corporate culture is shaped. The way that the individual interacts with society and other people has a direct influence on how they carry out their business activities (Schoenberger, 1997; Coe *et al*, 2007). In relation to the Singapore economy, this research captured a representation of the economy by observing companies and individuals from all three types of sectors – GLCs, MNCs and SMEs. Through empirical research, this thesis has sought to challenge the approach to understanding corporate culture (Deal and Kennedy, 1992), which emphasises the influence of key individuals and activities occurring within the corporate environment. The intra-firms and inter-firms networks, social relations and material practices (Schoenberger, 1997; Yeung, 2004) are explored to reveal how they can also affect the 'way things are done' at the workplace. From the empirical data, it is evident that the enduring social structures and processes, such as education, political and economic institutions, influence corporate culture. The theoretical considerations and implications have been examined, and this chapter will draw these arguments together. Section 8.2 will discuss the key points raised in each chapter and put forward a more complete framework for conceptualising corporate

culture. Section 8.3 will discuss the theoretical implications of the research, and possible future directions for the concept of corporate culture.

8.2   Research Discussion

The formation of corporate culture in a firm is a multi-faceted and complex process, involving 'rules of the game' set by social, cultural, economic and political conventions. Corporate culture is about 'how we do things here', and the corporation is a site where social and cultural practices are (trans)formed and re(produced). It is also a significant component of the socio-economic landscape as individuals spend most of their time in the workplace. Although the concept of corporate culture continues to be frequently invoked in the literature without due regard to its specific meaning (see Kono, 1994; Carrillo and Gromb, 1999), analysts have sought to define it in a variety of ways (see Hofstede, 1990; Deal and Kennedy, 1982; Schein, 1996, 1999; Schoenberger, 1997; O'Donovan, 2006). The conceptualisation of corporate culture in management studies has focused on the 'performance' and incentives of corporate culture it may bring to the firm. However, such mainstream discourse on corporate culture in management studies can be widened, and the discussion should be broadened to reflect and emphasise aspects of the economy and society that can play a part in shaping corporate culture.

In chapter 2, I evaluated the notion of corporate culture, and put forward a framework in understanding corporate culture. I also suggested incorporating a wider matrix of institutional forces and processes that influence corporate culture. Broadly, discussion regarding corporate culture within the management literature has highlighted a practice-based and quantitative approach to understanding corporate culture; focusing

on the performance and output of the firms (see Hofstede, 1990; Deal and Kennedy, 1982; Schein, 1999). In contrast to the inward and insular approach, a more extensive framework should be used to acknowledge the socio-economic landscapes surrounding the firm, and how they can (in)directly influence corporate culture. Corporations should thus be seen as a site for cultural processes as much as economic processes.

In this thesis, I have demonstrated how factors external to the corporation, can have a significant impact on corporate culture. While corporate culture can be created from within the corporate and company's structure, it is also shaped, influenced and constrained, at least in the group of companies observed in Singapore – by the wider and broader environment. Hence, the material practices, social relationships and political economy must also be included in the conceptualisation of corporate culture. The processes of political economy development and economic system play a part in the experience of the individuals, and contribute to the 'set of rules' in the shaping of corporate culture. The evidence has also challenged some of the data presented by Hofstede's perception of corporate culture in Singapore. For example, Singapore's uncertainty avoidance index is significantly lower than the world average and other Asian countries' uncertainty avoidance index (www.geert-hofstede.com), indicating that the society is more tolerant of opinions different from what they are used to, and are not expected to express emotions. In contrast, my empirical data has shown participants to be vocal about their emotions and feelings towards authority and management. The participants are also versatile to change, as long as it is 'implemented' by the authority, reflecting their preference for structure and hierarchy. As for Singapore's long-term orientation index, it reflects part of Hofstede's

perception of a strong-long term orientation. The empirical data has reflected a strong respect for tradition, but at the same time, fulfilling social obligations due to the Confucian values. The participants acknowledge the high priority for cherishing tradition, even in a modernizing society, but create their own distinct corporate culture by combining folklores with modern 'management speak'. As for the individualism index, according to Hofstede (www.hofstede.com), Singapore's score is lower than the world average index, indicating a strong collectivism index. This suggests that everyone is expected to look after him/herself and his/her immediate family, but is also integrated into strong, cohesive groups, and extended families, in exchange for unquestioning loyalty, and is strongly reflected throughout all the three companies. Furthermore, it is also clear that the strong collectivism index is shaped by not only the state, but also the cultural characteristics and Chinese capitalism. This aspect is clearly reflected by all the participants in the three companies, including the MNC, which was the least expected.

Chinese capitalism is the dominant mode of economic organisation in East and Southeast Asia not only because of its economic significance in the host economies (Redding, 1990; Yeung and Olds, 2000; Yeung, 2004; Redding and Witt, 2010), but also its intertwining, complex and intricate social organisation (Folk and Jomo, 2003; Huang, 2010). The sheer diversity and dexterity of economic activities controlled and coordinated by these ethnic Chinese have enabled some of them to become the foundations and support of many of the Asian economies in which they reside and operate. Furthermore, much of this diversity is due to the key features of Chinese businesses – business-government relations, language, family firms, *guanxi*, *mianzi*, Asian and Confucian values (see Yeung, 2000, 2004; Cauqeline *et al*, 2000;

Suryadinata, 2004; Redding and Witt, 2010). As reflected in the empirical discussion, symbolism or ceremonialism within the workplace extends to promoting *guanxi* and sustaining *mianzi*, and is being used to organise social relations by the participants. In chapter 7, I have discussed in more detail how Confucianism and Asian values are deeply embedded in society, and workplace. Chinese capitalism can be treated as a virulent variety of capitalism and a business system which is unstable and prone to the evolving macro-economic and political situation (see Berger and Dore, 1996; Yeung, 2004). This can impact on the way in which a company and the workers behave and operate, as seen in the 'local way of doing things' in a 'Westernised' MNC (for example, Smitha and Arthur) and 'modernising' GLC (for example, Loraine and Elmas). Returning to the present literature on corporate culture, such embodied features are rarely reflected in the present corporate culture literature, and this thesis contributes to bridging this knowledge gap.

In chapter 4, the political economy of Singapore is explored to provide a deeper understanding of the context and site of research. The discussion covered the history and legacy left by colonialism, providing further insights into the system of government and involvement of the state in the development of Singapore. The legacy left by colonialism was the need to establish economic stability and growth whilst still searching for an identity as a nation-state. In the process, official administrative processes were 'instructive' and 'prescriptive' to ensure optimal efficiency in the running of the country. This 'way of doing things' can also be seen in other aspects of the political economy, such as labour regime, population policy, national service and nation building development. These processes (in)directly affect the ways of thinking and material practices of the individuals (Schoenberger, 1997; Coe *et al*, 2007), and

are explicitly reflected, embedded and performed in their everyday lives within the workplace; and hence affecting corporate culture. From the empirical data, it is apparent how the participants (in all the three companies) combine their own embedded cultural characteristics with the legacy of the state, shaping the way they 'do thing' at the workplace. The effect of the state in the nation building process is deeply entrenched in the workers' attitude towards the way of doing things, as reflected in the attitudes and actions of Tess (GLC), Steven (SME) and Susan (MNC). The intimate relationship between the state and economy also provides insights into the very close connection between the corporate world and the government, and this has an impact on how corporate culture is shaped. The role of GLCs is highly significant due to their strong presence in the economic growth of Singapore. There are always inter-relating activities between GLCs and various non-GLCs. This inter-firm and intra-firm relationship and association between the two groups of organisations contributes to the shaping of patterns and processes in the formation of corporate culture. This is demonstrated by the professional and social relationships that the individuals (such as Emily, Jennifer, Arthur, Chiping and Elmas) have built over the years. Hence, the political and institutional processes are evidently portrayed, in a distinctive fashion of how 'things are done' in all the three companies.

The political and administrative role of the military is also part of the nation-building process. The boundaries between military, politics and administration are blurred as many senior civil servants and military personnel also take up positions in parliament (Perry *et al*, 1997; Huxley, 2000). In chapter 6, I argue that in the establishment of such a military-dominated regime, the societal embeddedness of such individuals and groups contributes in significant ways to the shaping of corporate culture. Moreover,

the way in which the labour and population are governed also provides a clear impression of how the workforce may behave and react to authority. The 'way things are done here' is very formulaic and regulated by the government. As displayed in the empirical discussion, there is with very little resistance as it is commonly accepted to be for the benefit of the economy. Consequently, this helps create an overall atmosphere of conformity which also transfers to the business environment in Singapore (see also Rodan, 2001). This sort of involvement by the state is echoed throughout the development path of Singapore (see also Chan, 1991; Drakakis-Smith and Graham, 1996; Coe and Kelly, 2002). This is also crucial to our understanding of corporate culture in Singapore. The way in which the society is 'managed' also reflects the way in which 'things are managed' in the corporate workplace.

In chapter 6, the analysis of data revealed that the Singapore nation building process had resulted in a definite and significant impact on the construction and shaping of corporate culture. In a multi-cultural and multi-racial society, Singapore exemplified the place-based dynamics of the intersection between cultural maintenance within specific ethnic communities and nation building (Kong and Yeoh, 2003). Regular public campaigns promoting a multi-racial society, national service (civil defence force, police, navy, army and air force) and language used, all play a part in (re)production of societal characteristics and political economy. The way in which people are accustomed to think and act throughout the nation building process can be seen in the workplace. The emphasis on unity, teamwork and sense of urgency regardless of ethnicity or race at the workplace were apparent; a result of the impact of the national service experienced at the corporate place which in turn nestles within a nation building process, which stresses unity and consensual development objectives.

The comradeship between national service men and reservists left a long-lasting effect, and was also evident in the workplace. However, the (in)active participation in national service was also a 'way of life' in the corporate workplace. Both men and women were part of this process and (sub)consciously incorporated enduring effects of national service into the workplace, allowing such practices to become part of their everyday corporate lives. National service is embedded and embodied in the societal culture of Singapore, and it is clear that the national service experience was fluid and flowed through to the corporate environment, and played a part in shaping corporate culture.

Language was also used as a code at the workplace to break down social barriers. According to Edwards (1985), language attitudes and use of language were part of the social fabric for the identity of a community. The language used goes beyond communication purposes but also acts as a symbolic affirmation of the community's identity. This was also reflected in my fieldwork; in a multicultural environment, language was used as a tool to affirm the identity of the group. In chapter 6, the discussion on the use of language reflected the importance of it as a medium to relate with the workforce; the use of 'management speak', Singlish, cultural references and 'army talk' were all used accordingly to relate to various groups and individuals at the workplace. Furthermore, the combination of transnationals and local professionals created a distinct style on 'how they speak' at the workplace and this shaped the way in which employees relate to one another, thus influencing the corporate culture. The examples from my fieldwork have demonstrated that corporate culture is influenced by the combination of international and local practices, language and identities. The transnational business community not only brought in their own experiences, they also

absorbed some of the local practices, shaping and moulding corporate culture. Hence, the use of language to (re)connect with the different groups at the workplace was also a 'way of life' both at the social and workplace, and as a result shaping corporate culture.

The evidence presented here has demonstrated that social patterns, such as familialism, paternalism and personalism, derived from Confucian values, were embedded in Singapore society and its corporate environment. These societal characteristics, together with the broader political and economic relations, contribute to the further conditioning of the society, and also to shaping of corporate culture in the workplace. In the corporate environment, Confucian and Asian values were deliberately used as vehicles to motivate the workforce, demonstrating how the cultural folklore and stories embedded and practiced in society were being (re)produced in the corporate workplace, creating a distinctive corporate culture, specific to the site of research.

The public endorsement of Confucian ethos by Mentor Minister Lee Kuan Yew reinforced the vital mechanics and the workings of the social order, reflecting the society's reliance and focus on Asian values and Confucianism. It is highly patriarchal and inherently conservative, and it advocates a social system that emphasises duty, loyalty, honour, filial piety, sincerity, respect for age and seniority. These traits remain valued within Singapore society and can even be seen as a driving force and in the way 'things are done' in family businesses (SMEs) and large companies (MNCs and GLCs). This hierarchical configuration in society is highly structured and is also explicitly represented in the corporate culture. The use of the family and friendships to

motivate teamwork and capacity showed the close connection between individuals and other social relationships. The term 'family' encompassed the immediate blood family and also the greater (business) community (see Hsing, 1996, 2003). The approval and endorsement from the community (immediate and extended family) was of importance to their work attitude and performance (Luo, 2007). The way they portrayed their motivation was a clear example of how this comradeship affected corporate culture.

The cultivation of *guanxi* and *mianzi* was also vital to daily business routines. *Guanxi* and *mianzi* were embodied characteristics in the social life of a multicultural Singaporean society, and were frequently used as points of reference by the individuals at the workplace, hence affecting corporate culture. *Guanxi* can facilitate and connect millions of Chinese firms into a social and business web (see Seligman, 1999; Yeung 2004; Luo, 2007; Redding and Witt, 2010). I have shown that successful and strong *guanxi* can (in)directly link one to new acquaintances and information resources, shaping how inter-firm and intra-firm networks and how 'things are done' at those levels. Another important concept in the Chinese culture is *mianzi*, a fragile commodity amongst the Chinese community. Although it is an abstract concept (see Seligman, 1999), evidence in chapter 7 has proven *mianzi* to be a vital aspect of business and social practices, thereby shaping corporate culture. Although writers have written about *guanxi* and *mianzi* (see Seligman, 1999; Yeung, 2004; Luo, 2007), it has not been associated with how they can affect corporate culture.

In the quest for higher status and social mobility, education and class status (see Mitchell, 1997; Beaverstock, 2002; Waters, 2008) are features that affect corporate

culture. Chapter 7 has demonstrated how societal and cultural traits have impacted on the process of achieving higher class status through attaining higher education, which in turn can shape corporate culture in the workplace. Evidence from the fieldwork has shown that overseas (university) educational experiences of individual, and different social class can contribute to the way in which corporate culture is moulded. The whole multitude of embodied and cultural characteristics of both local and overseas educated individuals provided the workplace with dynamic 'group memberships', which develop unique 'ways of doing things', thereby leading to a (re)creation of a distinctive corporate culture.

This thesis has outlined the dominant discussion in the literature of corporate culture and made an argument for the inclusion of a wider discussion, sensitive to geo-political landscapes. This section has outlined the main theoretical approaches to corporate culture, and discussed how the empirical work contributed and challenged these perspectives. Hence, taking the theoretical issues and empirical evidences into consideration, I argue for a new model in conceptualising corporate culture. In figure 3, I suggest a framework that not only includes societal characteristics, political economy, Chinese capitalism, rites, rituals and ceremonies, but also includes a flow and link between the set of components that can affect corporate culture. As the evidence has shown, the links between these components are inter-connected and embodied in the corporate workplace, and contribute to the shaping of corporate culture.
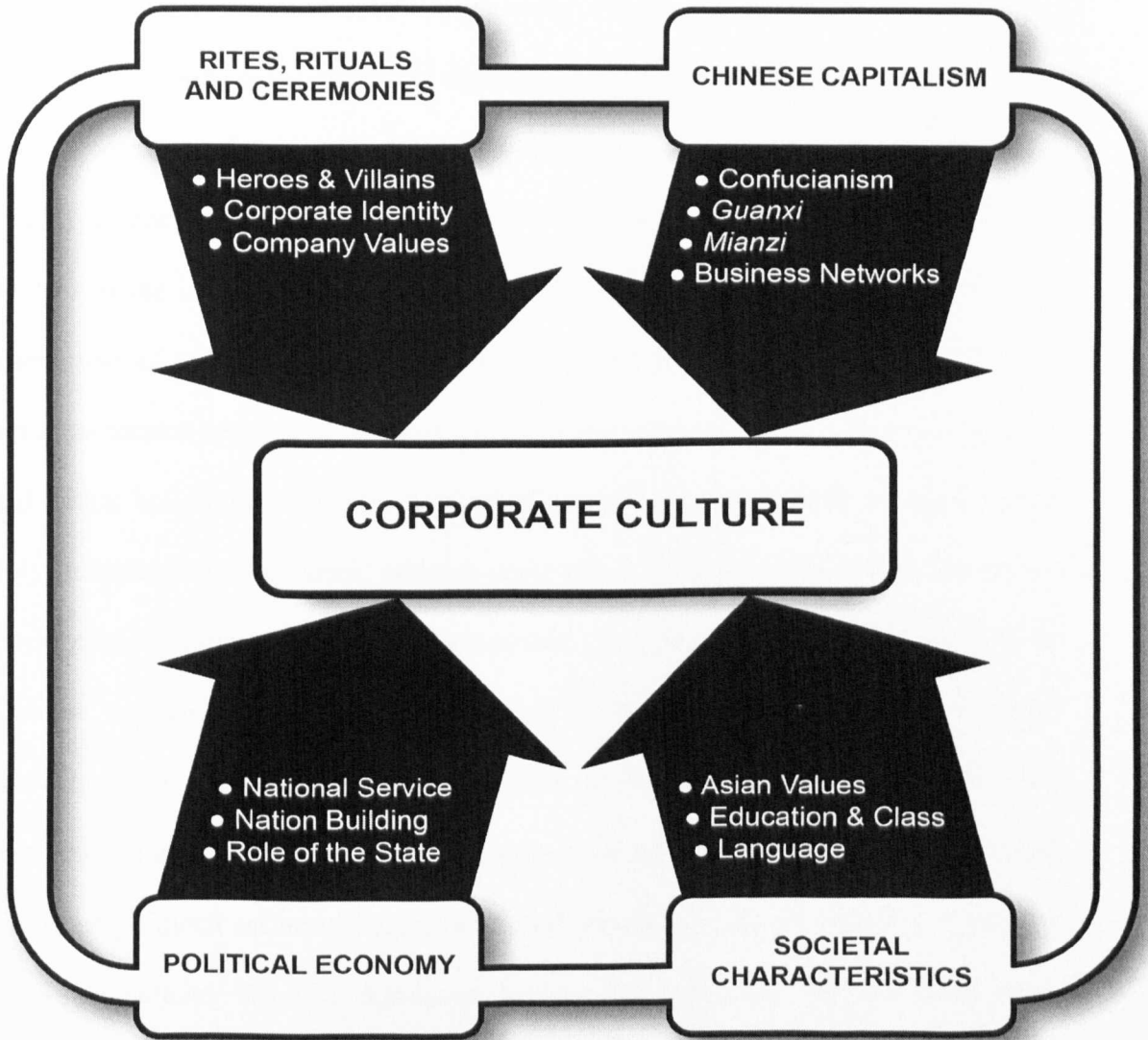
Fig 3: Corporate Culture in Singapore (author's own)

Figure 3 illustrates how the four main sets of components that influence the shaping of corporate culture are inter-linked. The recurrent patterns of behaviour, such as the rites, rituals and ceremonies are often the most vivid and memorable for employees (Brown, 1995). This is also true for my research; the ceremonies reinforce and remind the individuals of the corporate values, and cultural values. The rites and rituals are a series of calculated sets of activities that (re)produce patterns and practices in the

workplace. However, and more importantly, these activities are simultaneously informed and associated with the wider environment, outside the workplace. The heroes, corporate identity and company values (as discussed in chapters 5, 6 and 7), display characteristics and features of all the other components. This is especially evident in the interviews and observations of those who are working in the MNCs. Their 'way of doing things' are not exclusive to the stereotypical 'Westernised' style but incorporated features of national service, Confucianism, *guanxi*, language, *mianzi*, and nation building process. In the case of the SME, a typical local company is not only influenced by the 'local' practices and values, it is also affected by influences from overseas education and Chinese business networks. Hence, the key features of Chinese capitalism, political economy and societal characteristics are (re)created through these rites, rituals and ceremonies. Although each theme has its own distinctive features, they are also embodied within the site of the research and (in)directly embed influences from other components during the process of shaping corporate culture. What is significant is how the individual interacts with other components, developing a distinctive style of social relations and material practices. This complexity leads us to emphasise the diverse and dynamic nature of corporate culture. Corporate culture is place specific and is shaped by the embedded, embodied and entrenched characteristics of the location. Linking debates across the disciplines will be important to the way that understanding of corporate culture develops, and the next section will elaborate on this, suggesting how such a discussion can proceed.

8.3   Theoretical Implications and Future Research

Despite a common capitalist logic, firms around the world do not work in the same way (Coe *et al*, 2007). Instead, there is a range of practices and norms that are highly

differentiated, often reflecting influences of where they originate from (Schoenberger, 1997). However, the mosaic of the economic landscape is made more complicated by the multiple levels at which corporate culture is constituted; whilst there are commonalities in business practices across firms, regions and nations, there are also differences between them. Thus, a single and unifying model of 'best' business practices and corporate culture is wholly inappropriate and unrealistic. Here, I want to offer the following four main arguments. Firstly, the notion of the firm being a 'black box' in a 'borderless world' is no longer a realistic representation of the actual world. Business gurus and consultants, including Kenichi Ohmae's (1990) proclamation of a 'borderless world' must reconsider their perception that

> "country of origin does not matter. Location of headquarters does not matter. The products for which you are responsible and the company you serve have become denationalised."
>
> (ibid, p. 116)

My research has challenged such a denationalised view, and has shown how place does matter. National states are involved with the regulation and governance of production in a variety of ways, set within the context of the generalized engagement between state, economy, and society in the constitution of capitalism (Hudson, 2001). Secondly, the processes that link wider social forces to the way in which 'things are done' in the workplace must be given more significance. The economic organisation, societal characteristics and local political economy are powerful components in affecting the practices and norms of firms. The theoretical argument in section 2.3 has raised some issues to address these missing links. The evidence in chapters 6 and 7 has illustrated how such embeddedness of the local political and social characteristics are transmitted via the material practices of social relations, and everyday lives at the workplace, thereby affecting corporate culture. The MNCs have their own distinctive

corporate culture but it is also very much influenced by the local political and societal traits. The GLCs may have the outlook of a successful global business corporation and appear to have similar business practices as an MNC, but the norms and practices are heavily influenced by the nation building process. The SME has displayed that it is capable of being a contemporary business in a modernising society, but it also embodies and utilises the cultural traits of the society. Hence, national state plays a key role in social reproduction, and this is also evidently displayed at the various workplaces. However, it is important to acknowledge there is also a darker side expressed in intraclass division and particular patterns of ethnic and gender relations in Singaporean firms. Different class communities, patriarchal patterns of gender relations, ethnicity and gendered division of labour between different professions and management can be explored to provide further insights on performance in the workplace.

Thirdly, this research has shown the fluidity of Chinese capitalism, and its changing effects on corporate culture. Furthermore, this study also questions the notion that Chinese capitalism will converge towards a particular model of capitalism (see Hall and Soskice, 2001; Yeung, 2004). As illustrated in chapter 7, Chinese capitalism and its key actors cannot be essentialised as static cultural artefacts (see Redding, 1990; Redding and Witt, 2010), which resist modification and transformations. This is especially relevant with respect to the developmental trajectories of Chinese capitalism in Southeast Asia and other Chinese business communities outside Asia. The dynamics of Chinese capitalism depend critically on globalisation tendencies as a major transformational force in the global economy and have major influences on the business practices and corporate culture of the region. Chinese capitalism can

therefore affect and influence the institutional processes and values that shape corporate culture. Chinese capitalism is not a static or passive entity. Chinese capitalism is a hybrid form of economic organization embedded in regional and national contexts. Although many ethnic Chinese firms will continue to have strong family control and management, the professionalization of economic practices will continue to (re)shape Chinese capitalism. Firms are constrained by the rules of the markets, but markets are themselves shaped by the formal and informal rules that enable and proscribe the actions of firms within them. Systems of capitalism are thus complex, internally integrated, constantly evolving, and suited to competitive responses. The future of Chinese capitalism and its dominant form of economic organisation remain an inconclusive question. They bear the traces of their own histories, and cultures, and their particular models and ideals of government. The further liberalization of markets in East and Southeast Asia will likely intensify competition from global companies that have significant competitive advantages in various segments of the value chains. It will be insightful to juxtapose the findings with comparative cases such as Malaysia. Thailand, Vietnam, and South Korea.

Finally, this thesis has argued for an 'Asian perspective' on Economic Geography. As this study has demonstrated, more considerations need to be given to the wider issues that affect the individual's 'way of doing things' in the workplace. The prevailing literature from an Anglo-American perspective of corporate culture is inadequate for capturing the complex landscape of political economies in the Asia-Pacific region, and especially Singapore. Hence, an Asian perspective is much needed, and this thesis has added another dimension to the existing literature. Corporate culture is shaped not just by company values, but also by local cultural values and practices, including

language. Corporate culture is not just affected by the logic of capitalism, but is sensitive to a particular business system and economic organisation. Equally, corporate culture is a distinctive concept, shaped by (and embedded within) the national institutional framework. The scale and geographical region do matter in the conceptualisation of corporate culture, and the effect on performance in the workplace.

This thesis has contributed to the literature on the conceptualisation of corporate culture, through exploring the mechanisms of institutional and political processes, and how they are transmitted into the workplace to shape a distinctive corporate culture. What this piece of ethnographic research has done very powerfully is show how these mechanisms work in one particular context. So, moving on from here theoretically would involve exploring the nature of the linkages in other contexts, and in a similar ethnographic fashion to enhance the emerging qualitative research within management studies. It will also be relevant to apply this wider framework of conceptualising corporate culture to another place or region, in a different socioeconomic and political context, and enriching the discussion on corporate culture. Further place specific case studies could involve societies that have strong influences of Confucianism such as South Korea, Japan and Vietnam. In addition, nation states that implement national service, such as Malaysia and Turkey, are also places which warrant further research, and would be interesting studies to compare with Singapore.

Undertaking this research has reinforced my view that human and economic geography offer insights and perspectives that allow us more profound understandings as to the ways in which corporations develop and thrive. It reminds us that

globalisation is not necessarily about the homogenization of business and trade, and the search for some universal truth or model as to what constitutes good practice accepts diversity. In its attention to place, and all that follows – politically, culturally, economically, historically and socially – allows for more nuanced and powerful accounts and understandings of corporate culture. Such an understanding ought at the very least temper the tendency of some in the management sciences to seize upon simplistic proposals as 'let's use *feng shui*' for example, 'in all our corporate buildings because it seems to work for Singapore'. One can hardly expect *feng shui* to have the same impact in Chicago, where it has no cultural legacy or resonance as compared to Singapore where it is simply part of 'how we live there'.

However, as I have discovered in this research, many of the social science disciplines seem to develop within their own boundaries with relatively little direct inter-action even when they are discussing the same issues. Thus, literature on corporate culture within economic geography tends to speak only to geographers drawing on their own disciplinary literature with limited reference to material beyond their boundary, and likewise for the management sciences. Some of implications of this tendency of the social sciences to develop within their own 'silos' with little cross fertilisation or debate are felt personally. I want to be a human geographer teaching and researching in a university Business School, and I can see enormous benefits accruing from bringing such a perspective to management sciences. However, will I have to make a choice to be firmly in one camp or another? Will it be possible to find places to publish my more hybrid analyses? Or to secure research grant income and so forth which are so closely guarded by the social science elites? I am hopeful that I can sustain my approach but it is early days. Yet, if nothing else, I hope this thesis will in

its small way contribute to the awareness that a critical engagement between geography and the management sciences can lead us towards a more compelling and accurate understanding of the corporate world.

Bibliography

Andriesse, E. H. S., and van Helvoirt, B. J., 2010, 'Regional business systems and private sector development in Southeast Asia', *Asia Pacific Business Review*, voo. 16, pp. 19 – 36

Alvesson, M., 2002, *Understanding Organizational Culture*, Sage, London

Ambler, T., Witzel, M. and Xi, C., 2009, *Doing Business in China*, Routledge, New York

Amin, A. and Cohendet, P., 2004, *Architectures of Knowledge. Firms, Communities and Compentecies*, Oxford University Press, Oxford

Amin, A. and Thrift, N., 1994, *Globalisation, Institutions, and Regional Development in Europe*, Oxford University Press, Oxford

-------- 2000, What Kind of Economic Theory For What Kind of Economic Geography? *Antipode*, vol. 32, pp. 4 – 9

Anderson, O., 1993, 'On the internationalisation process of firms: a critical analysis', *Journal of International Business Studies*, vol. 24 (2), pp. 209 – 31

Andriesse, E. H. S. and van Helvoirt, B. J. 2010, 'Regional business systems and private sector development in Southeast Asia', *Asia Pacific Business Review*, vol. 16, pp. 19 – 36

Ang, B. C., 2003, 'The teaching of the Chinese language in Singapore', in Gopinathan, S., Pakir, A., Kam, H. W. and Saravanan, V. (eds), *Language, Society and Education in Singapore*, Eastern Universities Press, Singapore, pp. 335 – 352

Ang, I., 2001, *On Not Speaking Chinese: Living Between Asia and the West*, Routledge, London

Antonakis, J., Cianciolo, A. T. and Sternberg, R. J., 2004, *The nature of leadership*, Thousand Oaks: Sage

Arnott, R. and Wrigley, N., 2001, Editorial, *Journal of Economic Geography*, vol. 1, pp. 1 – 4

Appelbaum, R. P., 2000, 'Moving up: industrial upgrading, social networks and buyer-driven commodity chains in East Asian Chinese firms', *International Studies Review*, vol. 3 (1), pp. 21- 41

Appelbaum, R. P., and Henderson, J., (eds), 1992, *States and Development in the Asian Pacific Rim*, Sage, Newbury Park

Asiaweek, 21 May 2007, 'Talking Values: Mentor Minister Lee Kuan Yew'

Asher, M. G., 2001, "Some Aspects of Role of State in Singapore", (ed) Rodan, G., *Singapore,* Ashgate, London

Austin, I., 2009, 'Singapore in transition: economic change and political consequences', *Journal of Asian Public Policy,* voo. 2, pp. 266 – 278

Bando, S., 1990, "The Change in Singapore's Economy and Investment Environment", *Pacific Business and Industries*, vol. 1, pp. 28 – 32

Barker, C., 2000, *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice,* Sage, London

Barnett, C., 1998, The Cultural Turn: Fashion or Progress in Human Geography?, *Antipode*, vol. 30, pp. 379 – 394

------ 2001, "Culture, geography, and the arts of government" *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, vol. 19, pp. 7 – 24

Barnes, T. J., 2000, 'Inventing Anglo-American Economic Geography, 1889 – 1960', in Sheppard, E. and Barnes, T., (eds), *A companion to economic geography*, Blackwell, Oxford, pp. 11 – 26

------ 2001, Retheorising Economic Geography: From the Quantitative Revolution to the "Cultural Turn". *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, vol. 91, pp. 546 – 565

Barlow, C., 1999, *Institutions and Economic Change in Southeast Asia,* Edward Elgar, Cheltenham

Barr, M. D., 2002, *Cultural Politics And Asian Values*, Routledge, London

Bartlett, C. and Ghosal, S., 1998, *Managing Across Borders: the Transnational Solution*, Random House, London

Bass, B. M., 1990, *Bass and Stogdill's handbook on leadership: A survey of theory and research,* New York: Free Press

Beardsmore, H. B., 2003, 'Language shift and cultural implications in Singapore', in Gopinathan, S., Pakir, A., Kam, H. W. and Saravanan, V. (eds), *Language, Society and Education in Singapore*, Eastern Universities Press, Singapore, pp. 85 – 98

Beaverstock, J. V, 2002, 'Transnational elites in global cities: British expatriates in Singapore's financial district', *Geoforum*, vol. 33, pp. 525 – 538

------ 2005, 'Transnational elites in the city', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, vol. 31, pp. 245 – 268

Beaverstock, J. V. and Doel, M. A., 2001, 'Unfolding the spatial architecture of the East Asian Financial Crisis', *Geoforum*, vol. 32, pp. 15 - 32

Bellows, T., 2009, 'Meritocracy and the Singapore Political System', *Asian Journal of Political Science*, vol. 17, pp. 24 – 44

Bennett, R., 1999, *Corporate Strategy*, Prentice Hall, Harlow

Berg, P. O. and Kreiner, K., 1990, 'Corporate Architecture: Turning physical settings into symbolic resources', in Gagliardi, R. (ed) *Symbols and Artifacts: Views of the Corporate Landscape*, Aldine de Gruyter, New York, pp. 41 - 67

Berger, P. L. and Huntington, S. P., 2002, *Many Globalisations*, Oxford University Press, Oxford

Berger, S. and Dore, R., (eds), 1996, *National Diversity and Global Capitalism*, Cornell University Press, New York

Beyer, J. M. and Trice, H. M., 1988 'The Communication of Power Relations in Organisations through Cultural Rites', in Jones, M. D., Moore, M. D. and Sayder, R. C. (eds), *Inside Organisations: Understanding the Human Dimension*, Sage, London, p. 141 – 157

Block, F., 2002, 'Rethinking capitalism', in Nicole W. Briggart (ed.), *Readings in Economic Sociology*, pp. 219-30, Blackwell, Oxford

Bolt, P. J., 2000, *China and Southeast Asia's Ethnic Chinese: State and Diaspora in Contemporary Asia*, Praeger, New York

Borjas, G. J., 1996, *Labour Economics*, McGraw-Hill, New York

Bosworth, D., Dawkins, P. and Stromback, T., 1996, *The Economics of the Labour Market*, Addison Wesley Longman, Harlow

Bourdieu, P., 1984, *Distinctions: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, M.A.

Bower, M., 1966, *The Will to Manage*, McGraw-Hill, New York

Boyer, R. and Hollingsworth, J. R., 1999, *Contemporary Capitalism: The Embeddedness of Institutions*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge

Brock, D. M., Shenkar, O., Shoham, A. and Siscovick, I. C., 'National culture and expatriate deployment', *Journal of International Business Studies*, vol. 39, pp. 1293 – 1309

Brown, D. A., 1995, *Organisational Culture*, Pitman, London

Brown, R. A., 1996, *Chinese Business Enterprise in Asia*, Routledge, London

------   2000, *Chinese Big Business and the Wealth of Asian Nations*, Palgrave, London

Bryman, A., 1992, "Quantitative and qualitative research: further reflections on their integration", in *Mixing Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Research*, ed. Brannen, J. A., Aldershot, Hants, pp. 57 – 58

Buckley, P. J. and Casson, M. C., 2009, 'The internalisation theory of the multinational enterprise: a review of the progress of a research agenda after 30 years', *Journal of International Business Studies*, vol. 40, pp. 1563 – 1580

Buderi, R. and Huang G. T., 2004, *Guanxi: Microsoft, China and Bill Gates' Plan to Win the Road Ahead*, Arrow Books, London

Bunnell, T. G. and Coe, N. M., 2001, 'Spaces and scales of motivation', *Progress in Human Geography*, vol. 25, pp. 569 – 589

Carrillo, J. and Gromb, D., 1999, 'On the strength of corporate cultures', *European Economic Review*, vol. 43, pp. 1021 – 1037

Carroll, W. K., 2009, 'Transnationalists and national networkers in the global corporate elite', *Global Networks*, vol. 9, pp. 289 – 314

Carroll, W. K. and Fennema, M., 2002, 'Is there a transnational business community?', *International Sociology*, vol. 17, pp. 393 – 149

Cartier, C., 2003, 'Diaspora and social restructuring in postcolonial Malaysia', in Ma, L. J. C. and Cartier, C. (eds), *The Chinese Diaspora: Space, place, mobility and identity*, Rowman & Littlefield, Maryland

Castells, M., 1992, 'Four Asian Tigers with a Dragon Head: A Comparative Analysis of the State, Economy, and Society in the Asian Pacific Rim', Appelbaum R P and Henderson J (eds), *States and Development in the Asian Pacific Rim*, Sage, London, pp 33 – 70

Castree, N., 2003, 'Place: connection and boundaries in an interdependent world', Holloway, S., Rice, S., Valentine, G. (eds), *Key Concepts in Geography*, London: Sage

Castree, N., Coe, N. M., Ward, K., and Samers, M., 2004, *Spaces of Work: Global Capitalism and Geographies of Labour*, Sage, London

Caufield, C., 1996, *Masters of Illusion: The World Bank and the Poverty of Nations*, Macmillan, London

Cauquelin, J., Lim, P. and Mayer-Konig, B., 1998, *Asian Values: Encounter with diversity*, Curzon, Surrey

Chan, H. C., 1987, 'Political Parties', (eds) Quah J, Chan H C and Seah C M, *Government and Politics of Singapore*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp. 146 – 172

------ 1991, 'Political Developments, 1965 – 1979' in *A History of Singapore* (eds) Chiew E C T and Lee E, Oxford University Press, New York, pp. 157 – 181

Chang, J. H-Y, 2003, 'Culture, state and economic development in Singapore', *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, vol. 33, pp. 85 – 105

Channelnewsasia.com, 9 August 2000, Prime Minister's National Day Speech
------ 9 August 2005, 'Foreign Talent' is good for our country
------ 25 April 2006, Bicultural candidates feature strongly in general elections

Cheng, S. H., 1991, 'Political Developments, 1965 – 1979' in *A History of Singapore* (eds) Chiew E C T and Lee E, Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp. 182 – 216

Cheng, J. L. C., Henisz, W. J., Roth, K. and Swaminathan, A., 2009, 'From the editors: advancing interdisciplinary research in the field of international business: Prospects, issues and challenges', *Journal of International Business Studies*, vol. 40, pp. 1070 – 1074

Chua, R. Y. J., Morris, M. W. and Ingram, P., 2009, '*Guanxi* vs Networking: distinctive configurations of affect- and cognition-based trust in the networks of Chinese vs American managers', *Journal of International Business*, vol. 40, pp. 490 – 508

Chuan, K. E., 2007, 'Labour force growth in Singapore', *Asian Population Studies*, vol. 3, pp. 207 – 220

Clammer, J., 1993, 'Deconstructing Values: The Establishment of National Ideology and its Implication for Singapore's Political Future', (eds) Rodan G, *Singapore Changes Guard*, Longman, pp. 34 – 51

Clark, G. L., Feldman, M. P. and Gertler, M. S., 2000, *The Oxford Handbook of Economic Geography*, Oxford University Press, Oxford

Clegg, Stewart R. and Redding, S. Gordon (eds.) (1990), *Capitalism in Contrasting Cultures*, De Gruyter, Berlin

Cloke, P., Philo, C. and Sadler, D., 1991, *Approaching Human Geography: An Introduction to Contemporary Theoretical Debates*, Paul Chapman, London

Coe, N. M. and Kelly, P. F., 2002, 'Languages of Labour: representational strategies in Singapore's labour control regime', *Political Geography*, vol. 21, pp. 341 - 371

Coe, N. M., Kelly, P. F. And Yeung, H. W. C., 2007, *Economic Geography*, Blackwell, Oxford

Collins, F., L., 2008, 'Bridges to learning: international student mobilities, education agencies and inter-personal networks', *Global Networks*, vol. 8, pp. 398 – 417

Conger, J. A and Riggio, R. E., 2007, *The practice of leadership: Developing the next generation of leaders*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco

Corson, D., 1993, *Language, Minority Education and Gender*, Ontario Institute, Toronto

Crang, P., 1994, 'It's showtime: on the workplace geographies of display in a restaurant in southeast England', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, vol. 12, pp. 675 – 704

------ 1997, 'Cultural Turns and The Re(Constitution) of Economic Geography', *Geographies of Economies*, Lee, R. and Wills, J. (eds), Arnold, London, pp 3 – 5

------ 2000, Cultural Turn, in Johnston, R. J., Gregory, P. G. and Watts, M., (eds) *The Dictionary of Human Geography*, Blackwell, London

Creswall, J. W., 1994, *Research Design: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*, Sage, Thousand Oaks

Crouch, C., 2005, *Capitalist diversity and change. Recombinant governance and institutional entrepreneurs*, Oxford University Press, Oxford

Czinkota, M., Ronkainen, I., Moffett, M., Marinova, S., and Marinov, M., 2009, *International Business*, Wiley, West Sussex

Dahles, H., 2005, 'Culture, capitalism and political entrepreneurship: transnational business ventures of the Singapore-Chinese in China', *Culture and Organisation*, vol. 11, pp. 45 – 58

Davidson, G. and Drakakis-Smith, D., 1997, 'The Price of Success: Disadvantaged groups in Singapore', (eds) Dixon, C. and Drakakis-Smith, D., *Uneven Development in South East Asia*, Ashgate, England

De Bary, W., 1998, *Aisan Values and Human Rights: A Confucian communitarian perspective*, Harvard University Press, London

De Vaus, D. A., 2001, *Surveys in Social Research*, Routledge, London

Deal, T. E. and Kennedy, A., 1982, *Corporate Cultures*, Perseus Publishing, New York

------   1999, *The New Corporate Culture*, Texere, New York

Dicken, P., 2003, *Global Shift: Reshaping the global economic map in the 21st century*, Sage, London

Dicken, P., Kelly, P.F., Olds, K. and Yeung, H.W-C., 2001, 'Chains and networks, territories and scales: towards a relational framework for analysing the global economy', *Global Networks*, vol. 1, pp. 99 – 123

Dicken, P. and Malmberg, A., 2001, 'Firms in Territories: A Relational Perspective', *Economic Geography*, vol. 77, pp. 345 – 363

Drakakis-Smith, D., Graham, E., Teo, P. and Ling, O. G., 1993, 'Singapore: reversing the demographic transition to meet labour needs', *Scottish Geographical Magazine*, vol. 109, pp. 152 – 163

Drakakis-Smith, D. and Graham, E., 1996, 'Shaping the Nation State: Ethnicity, Class and the New Population Policy in Singapore', *International Journal of Population Geography*, vol. 2, pp. 69 – 89

Drennan, D., 1992, *Transforming Company Culture*, McGraw-Hill, London

Dunning, J. H., 2009, 'Location and the multinational enterprise: A neglected factor?', *Journal of International Business Studies*, vol. 40, pp. 5 – 19

Edwards, J., 1985, *Language, Society and Identity*, Blackwell, Oxford

Ettlinger, N., 2001, 'A Relational Perspective in Economic Geography: Connecting Competitiveness with Diversity and Difference', *Antipode*, vol. 33, pp. 216 – 227

Eyles, J., 1988, 'Interpreting the Geological World', *Qualitative Approaches in Geographical Research*, (eds) Eyles, J. and Smith, D. S., Polity, London

Fan, C., 2003, 'Chinese Americans: Immigration, settlement, and social geography', in Ma, L. J. C. and Cartier, C. (eds), *The Chinese Diaspora: Space, place, mobility and identity*, Rowman & Littlefield, Maryland, pp. 261- 291

Faulconbridge, J. R., 2006, 'Stretching tacit knowledge beyond a local fix? Global spaces of learning in advertising professional service firms', *Journal of Economic Geography*, vol. 6, pp. 517 – 540

------ 2007, 'London's and New York's advertising and law clusters and their networks of learning: relational analyses with a politics of scale?', *Urban Studies*, vol. 44, pp. 1635 – 1656

------ 2008a, 'Negotiating cultures of work in transnational law firms', *Journal of Economic Geography*, vol. 8, pp. 497 – 517

------ 2008b, 'Managing the transnational law firm: a relational analysis of professional systems, embedded actors, and time-space-sensitive governance', *Economic Geography*, vol. 84, pp. 185 – 210

Faulconbridge, J. R., Hall, S. J. E. and Beaverstock, J. V., 2008, 'New insights into the internationalisation of producer services: organisational strategies and spatial economies for global headhunting firms', *Environment and Planning A*, vol. 40 , pp. 210 – 234

Financial Times, 12 May 2009, In Conversation With Jack Welch

Fisher-Yoshida, B. and Geller, K. D., 2009, 'Transnational Leadership Development', American Management Association, New York

Flowerdew, R., 1995, 'Mixed Methods in Population Geography', *Population Geography Study Group Newsletter*, vol. 25, pp. 2 – 4

Folk, B. C. and Jomo, K. S., 2003, 'Introduction' in Folk, Brian C. and Jomo K. S. (eds) *Ethnic Business: Chinese capitalism in Southeast Asia*, RoutledgeCurzon, London, pp. 1–9

Fontana, A. and Frey, J., 2000, 'The interview: from structured questions to negotiated text', Denzin, N. K. and Lincoln, Y. S. (eds), *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Thousand Oaks, pp. 291 – 318

Fox, R. G., 1985, *Lions of the Punjab: Culture in the Making*, University of California Press, Berkeley, CA

Fynsk, C., 1996, *Language and Relation*, Stanford University Press, Stanford

Geertz, C., 1975, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*, Hutchinson, London

George, C., 2000, *Singapore: The Air-conditioned Nation – Essays on the Politics of Comfort and Control 1990 – 2000*, Landmark Books, Singapore

Gertler, M. S., 2001, "Best practice? Geography, learning and institutional limits to strong convergence." *The Journal of Economic Geography*, vol 1 (1), pp. 5 – 26

-------- 2003, 'A Cultural Economic Geography of Production', in *Handbook of Cultural Economy*, (eds) Anderson, K., Domosh, M., Pile, S. and Thrift, N. pp 131 – 146.

-------- 2004, *Manufacturing culture: the institutional geography of industrial practice*, Oxford University Press, Oxford

Glasmeier, A.K., 2001, *Manufacturing Time: Global Competition in the Watch Industry*, 1795 – 2000, Guilford, New York

Godelier, M., 1986, *The Mental and the Material*, Verso, London

Gomez, E. T., 2004, 'Chinese business development in Malaysia: networks, entrepreneurship or patronage? in Menkhoff, T. And Gerke, S. (eds) *Chinese Entrepreneurship and Asian Business Networks*, Routledge, London, pp. 159 – 183

Gottheil, F. M., 1996, *Principles of Economics*, Southwestern, Ohio

Gopinathan, S., 1991, 'Education' in *A History of Singapore*, (eds) by Chiew E C T and Lee E, pp. 268 – 287, Oxford University Press, Oxford

Gough, J., 2001, 'Work, class and social life', in Pain, R. with Barke, M., Fuller, D., Gough, J., MacFarlene, R. and Mowl, G. (eds), *Introducing Social Geographies*, Arnold, London, pp. 13 – 43

Grabher, G., 1993, *The Embedded Firm*, Routledge, London

Graham, E., 1995, "Singapore in the 1990s", *Applied Geography*, vol. 15, pp. 219 – 232

Granovetter, M., 1985, 'Economic Action and Social Structure: The Problem of Embeddedness', *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 91, pp. 481 – 510

Grice, K. and Drakakis-Smith, D., 1985, 'The Role of the State in Shaping Development: Two Decades of Growth in Singapore', *Transactions of Institute of British Geographers*, vol. 10, pp. 347 – 59

Griffin, R. W. and Pustay, M. W., 2010, *International Business*, Pearson, New Jersey

Griffith, D. A., Cavusgil, S. T. and Xu, S., 2008, 'Emerging themes in international business research', *Journal of International Business Studies*, vol. 39, pp. 1220 – 1235

Grint, K., 2005a, *Leadership: Limits and Possibilities*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke

------- 2005b, *The Sociology of Work*, Polity Press, Cambridge

Hamilton, G., 1999, *Cosmopolitan Capitalists*, University of Washington Press, Seattle

------ 2004, *Commerce and Capitalism in Chinese Societies*, RoutledgeCurzon, London

Han, C., 2000, 'National Education and 'Active Citizenship': Implications for Citizenship and Citizenship Education in Singapore, *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, vol. 20, pp. 63 – 72

Hall, R. H., 1994, *Sociology of work: perspectives, analyses, and issues*, Pine Forge Press, Thousand Oaks

Hall, S., 1997, 'The work of representation', in Hall, S. (ed), *Representation: cultural representations and signifying practices*, Sage, London, pp. 13 – 75

Hall, S., 2007, 'Relational marketplaces' and the rise of boutiques in London's corporate finance industry', *Environment and Planning A*, vol. 39, pp. 1838 – 1854

------ 2008, 'Geographies of business education: MBA programmes, reflexive business schools and the cultural circuit of capital, *Transactions Institute British Geographers*, vol. 33, pp. 27 – 41

------ 2009, 'Financialised elites and the changing nature of Finance Capitalism: Investment bankers in London's financial district', *Competition and Change*, vol. 13, pp. 173 – 189

Hall, S. and Appleyard, L., 2009, 'City of London, City of Learning?', *Journal of Economic Geography*, vol. 9, pp. 597 – 617

Hall, S., Beaverstock, J. V., Faulconbridge, J. R. and Hewitson, A., 2009, 'Exploring cultural economies of internationalization: role of "iconic individuals" and "brand leaders" in the globalisation of headhunting', *Global Networks*, vol. 9, pp. 399 – 419

Hall, P. A. and Soskice, D., (eds.), 2001, *Varieties of Capitalism: The Institutional Foundations of Comparative Advantage*, Oxford University Press, Oxford

Harvey, D., 1989, *The condition of postmodernity*, Blackwell: Oxford

------ 1993, 'From space to place and back again', in Bird, J. *et al* (eds), *Mapping the futures: local cultures, global change*. New York, Routledge, pp. 3 – 29

Hasan, R., 2008, 'Reflections on the impact upon China's polity from the retreat of the State Capitalism', *Critical Sociology*, vol. 34, pp. 575 – 597

Heartfield, J., 2005 'China's comprador capitalism is coming home', *Review of radical political economics'*, vol. 37, pp. 196 – 214

Henderson, J., Dicken, P., Hess, M., Coe, N. and Yeung., H W-C, 2002, 'Global production networks and the analysis of economic development', *Review of International Political Economy*, vol. 9, pp. 436 – 464

Henderson, J., 1993, 'The Role of the State in the Economic Transformation of East Asia', (eds) Dixon, Cc and Drakakis-Smith, D., , *Economic and Social Development in Pacific Asia*, Routledge, London, pp. 85 – 114

Henderson, J. and Appelbaum, R. P., 1992, 'Situating the State in the East Asia Development Process', Appelbaum, R. P. and Henderson, J. (eds), *States and Development in the Asian Pacific Rim*, Sage, London, pp. 1 – 26

Henry, N., Pollard, J. and Sidaway, J. D., 2001, 'Beyond the Margins of Economics: Geographers, Economists, and Policy Relevance', *Antipode*, vol. 33, pp. 200 – 207

Herod, A., 1999, 'Reflections on interviewing foreign elites: praxis, positionality, validity, and the cult of the insider', *Geoforum*, vol. 30, pp. 313 – 327

Hill, M. and Lian, K. F., 1995, *The Politics of Nation Building and Citizenship in Singapore*, Routledge, London

Hirst, G., Budhwar, P., Cooper, B. K., West, M., Chen, L., Xu, C. and Shipton, H., 2008, 'Cross-cultural variations in climate for autonomy, stress and organisational productivity relationships: a comparison of Chinese and UK manufacturing organisations', *Journal of International Business Studies*, vol. 39, pp. 1343 – 1358

Ho, E. L. E., 2006, 'Negotiating belonging and perceptions of citizenship in a transnational world: Singapore, a cosmopolis?', *Social and Cultural Geography*, vol. 7, pp. 385 – 401

-------- 2011, 'Identity politics and cultural asymmetries: Singaporean transmigrants 'fashioning' cosmopolitanism', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, vol. 37, pp. 729 – 746

Hodder, R., 1996, *Merchant Princes of the East*, John Wiley, West Sussex

Hofstede, G., 1980, *Culture's consequences: international differences in work related values'*, Sage: Beverly Hills, CA

------ 2001, *Culture's consequences: comparing values, behaviours, institutions, and organizations across nations*, Sage: Thousand Oaks, CA

------ 2010, 'The GLOBE debate: Back to relevance', *Journal of International Business Studies*, vol. 41, pp. 1339 – 1346

------ 2011, www.geert-hofstede.com

Holden, P., 2010, 'Interrogating Multiculturalism and Cosmopolitanism in the City-State: Some recent Singapore fiction in English', *Mobilities*, vol. 5, pp. 277 – 290

Howells, J., 2000, 'Knowledge, innovation and location', in Bryson, J. R., Daniels, P. W., Henry, N. and Pollard, J., (eds), *Knowledge, Space, Economy*, Routledge, London, pp. 50 – 62

Hsing, Y-T., 1996, 'Blood, thicker than water: interpersonal relations and Taiwanese investment in southern China', *Environment and Planning A*, vol. 28, pp. 2241 – 2261

------ 1997, 'Building *guanxi* across The Straits: Taiwanese capital and local Chinese bureaucrats, in in Ong, A. and Nonini, D (eds), *Ungrounded empires: the cultural politics of modern Chinese transnationalism*, Routledge, New York, pp. 228 – 256

------ 1998, *Making capitalism in China: the Taiwan connection*, Oxford University Press, Oxford

------ 2003, 'Ethnic identity and business solidarity: Chinese capitalism revisited', Ma, L. J. C. and Cartier, C. (eds), *The Chinese Diaspora: Space, place, mobility and identity*, Rowman & Littlefield, Maryland, pp. 221 – 236

Huang, S. and Yeoh, B. S. A., 1996, 'Ties That Bind: State Policy and Migrant Female Domestic Helpers in Singapore', *Geoforum*, vol. 27, pp. 479 – 493

Huang, Y., 2010, *Capitalism with Chinese characteristics: Entrepreneurship and the State*, Cambridge University Press

Hubbard, P., Kitchen, R., Bartley, B. and Fuller, D., 2002, *Thinking geographically: space, theory and contemporary human geography*, Continuum, London

Hudson, R., 2001, *Producing Places,* Guilford, New York

Huff, W. G., 1994, *The Economic Growth of Singapore*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge

Huxley, T., 2000, *Defending the Lion City: The Singapore Armed Forces*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney

Hwa, C. S., 1991, 'Economic Change and Industrialisation', *A History of Singapore*, (eds) Chiew, E. C. T. and Lee, E., pp. 182 – 216, Oxford University Press, Oxford

International Monetary Fund (IMF), *World Economic Outlook*, various issues

Jackson, G. and Deeg, R., 2008, 'From comparing capitalisms to the politics of institutional change', *Review of International Political Economy*, vol. 15, pp. 680 – 709

------- 2009, 'Comparing capitalisms: understanding institutional diversity and its implications for international business', *Journal of International Business Studies*, vol. 39, pp. 540 – 561

James, A., 2006, 'Critical moments in the production of "rigorous" and "relevant" cultural economic geographies', *Progress in Human Geography*, vol. 20, pp. 289 – 308

Javidan, M., House, R., Dorfman, P., Hanges, P. and de Luque, M., 2006, 'Conceptualising and measuring cultures and their consequences: a comparative review of GLOBE's and Hofstede's approaches', *Journal of International Business Studies*, vol. 37, pp. 897 – 914

Johnson, G., Scholes, K. And Whittington, R., 2008, *Exploring Corporate Strategy*, Prentice Hall, Harlow

Jomo, K. S., 2003, 'Chinese capitalism in Southeast Asia' in Folk, B. C. and Jomo, K. S., (eds) *Ethnic Business: Chinese capitalism in Southeast Asia*, pp. 10–25, RoutledgeCurzon, London

Jonas, A. E. G., 1996, 'Local labour control regimes: uneven development and the social regulation of production' *Regional Studies*, vol. 30, pp. 323 – 388

Jones, D. M., 1995, 'Toward a Model of Illiberal Democracy', (eds) Brown, D., Jayasuriya, K., Jones, D. M., pp. 163 – 67, *Towards Illeberal Democracy in Pacific Asia*, Macmillan Press

Kao, John, 1993, 'The Worldwide Web of Chinese Business', *Harvard Business Review*, March/ April, pp. 24 – 36

Katz, M. L. and Rosen, H. S., 2005, *Microeconomics*, McGraw-Hill, New York

Kearns, D., and Nadler, D., 1992, *Prophets in the Dark: How Xerox Reinvented Itself and Beat Back the Japanese*, Harper Business, New York

Keesing, R. M., 1981, *Cultural Anthropology: a contemporary perspective*, Harcourt Brace College Publishers, Florida

Kirkman, B., Lowe, K., Gibson, C., 2006, 'A quarter century of Culture's Consequences: a review of empirical research incorporating Hofstede's cultural values framework', *Journal of International Business Studies*, vol. 37, pp. 185 – 320

Kitchin, R. and Tate, N. J., 2000, *Conducting Research into Human Geography*, Prentice Hall

Koh, A., 2005, 'Imagining the Singapore 'nation' and 'identity': the role of the media and National Education', *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, vol. 25, pp. 75 – 91

Koh, E., 4 March 2003, 'Singapore on the way to being private wealth centre', *The Straits Times Interactive*, <http://straitstimes.asia1.com.sg>

Kong, L., 2000, 'Cultural policy in Singapore: negotiation economic and soci-cultural agendas' *Geoforum*, vol. 31, pp. 409 – 424

Kong, L. and Yeoh, B., 2003, 'Nation, ethnicity, and identity: Singapore and the dynamics and discourses of Chinese migration', in Ma, L. J. C. and Cartier, C. (eds), *The Chinese Diaspora: Space, place, mobility and identity*, Rowman & Littlefield, Maryland, pp. 193 – 220

Kono, T., 1994, 'Changing a Company's Strategy and Culture', *Long Range Planning*, vol. 27, pp. 85 – 97

Kopina, H., 2005, 'Family Matters? Recruitment methods and cultural boundaries in Singapore Chinese Small and Medium Enterprises', *Asia Pacific Business Review*, vol. 11, pp. 483 – 499

Kotter, J.P., and Heskett, J.L., 1992, *Corporate Culture and Performance*, Free Press, New York

Kunda, G., 1992, *Engineering Culture*. Temple University Press, Philadelphia

Krugman, P., 1998, 'What's new about the New Economic Geography?', *Oxford Review of Economic Policy*, vol. 14, pp. 7 – 17

Kwok, C. C. and Tadesse, S., 2006, 'National culture and financial systems', *Journal of International Business Studies*, vol. 37, pp/ 227 – 247

Lai, K. P. Y. and Yeung, H. W. C., 2003, 'Contesting the state: discourses of the Asian economic crisis and mediating strategies of electronics firms in Singapore', *Environment and Planning A*, vol. 35, pp. 463 – 488

Lai, S. T-A., 2005, 'Unpacking regional ethnicity and the strength in shaping ethnic entrepreneurship', *Organization Studies*, vol. 26, pp. 1189 – 1216

Lai S. T-A. and Lee, Y-J., 2003, 'The State Matters: Management Models of Singaporean Chinese and Korean Business Groups', *Organization Studies*, vol. 24, pp. 507 – 534

Lane, C. and Wood, G., 2009, 'Capitalist diversity and diversity within capitalism', *Economy and Society*, vol. 38, pp. 531 – 551

Lee, B., 3 July 2003a, 'Network Giant Moves Sydney Lab to Singapore', *The Straits Times Interactive (STI)*, <http://straitstimes.asia1.com.sg>

------ 31 July 2003b, "HP bases new research centre in Singapore", *The Straits Times Interactive (STI)*, <http://straitstimes.asia1.com.sg>

Lee, E., 1989, 'The Colonial Legacy', (eds) Sandhu, K. S. and Wheatley, P., pp. 3 – 50, *Management of Success: The Moulding of Modern Singapore*, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore

Lee, R., 1997, 'Economic Geographies: Representation and Interpretations', *Geographies of Economies*, (eds Willis, J. and Lee, R.), Arnold, London, pp. xi – xiv

------ 2002, 'Geography, policy and geographical agendas – a short intervention in a continuing debate', *Progress in Human Geography*, vol. 26, pp. 627 – 628

Lee, S. M., Alvarez, G. and Palen, J. J., 1991, 'Fertility Decline and Pronatalist Policy in Singapore', *International Family Planning Perspectives*, vol. 17, pp. 65 – 73

Ley, D., 2004, 'Transnational spaces and everyday lives', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, vol. 29, pp. 151 – 64

Ley, D. and Mountz, A., 2001, 'Interpretation, representation, positionality: issues in field research in human geography', in Limb, M. and Dwyer, C. (eds), *Qualitative Methodologies for Geographers: Issues and Debates*, Arnold, London, pp. 234 - 250

Ley, D. and Waters, J., 2004, 'Transnational migration and the geographical imperative' in Peter Jackson (ed.) *Transnational Spaces*, Routledge, London, pp. 104 - 121

Lim, L. Y. C., 2000, 'Southeast Asian Chinese Business: Past Success, Recent Crisis and Future Evolution', *Journal of Asian Business*, vol. 16, pp. 1–14

Lin, C., 2008, 'Demystifying the Chameleonic Nature of Chinese Leadership', *Journal of Leadership and Organizational Studies*, vol. 14, pp. 303 – 321

Lindahl, J. and Thomsen, L., 2004, 'Private business and socio-economic network relations in the Chinese community in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam', in Menkhoff, T. and Gerke, S. (eds) *Chinese Entrepreneurship and Asian Business Networks*, Routledge, London, pp. 129 – 156

Liu, H., 1998, 'Old Linkages, New Networks: The Globalisation of Overseas Chinese Voluntary Associations and Its Implications', *China Quaterly*, vol. 155, pp. 582 – 609
------- 2009, *Chinese Business: Landscapes and Strategies*, Routledge, London

Luo, Y., 2007, *Guanxi and Business*, World Scientific Publishing, London

Ma, L. J. C., 2003, 'Space, place, and transnationalism in the Chinese diaspora', in Ma, L. J. C. and Cartier, C. (eds), *The Chinese Diaspora: Space, place, mobility and identity*, Rowman & Littlefield, Maryland, pp. 1 – 50

Machado, K. G., 2003, 'Japanese transnational production networks and ethnic Chinese business networks in East Asia: linkages and regional integration', in Folk, B. C. and Jomo, K. S. (eds) *Ethnic Business: Chinese capitalism in Southeast Asia*, RoutledgeCurzon, London, pp. 211–234

Mackie, J., 2003, 'Pre-1997 Sino-Indonesian conglomerates, compared with those of other ASEAN countries', in Folk, B. C. and Jomo, K. S. (eds) *Ethnic Business: Chinese capitalism in Southeast Asia*, RoutledgeCurzon, London, pp. 105–129

Mau, S., Mewes, J. and Zimmermann, A., 2008, 'Cosmopolitan attitudes through transnational social practices', *Global Networks*, vol. 8, pp. 1 – 24

Martin, R., 1999, The New 'Geographical Turn' in Economics: some critical reflections, *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, vol. 23, pp. 65 – 91

Martin. R, and Sunley. P., 2001, "Rethinking the 'economic' in economic geography: Broadening our vision or losing our focus?", *Antipode*, vol. 33, pp. 148 - 61

Martin, J., 1992, *Cultures in Organisation*, Oxford University Press, Oxford

------ 2002, *Organizational Culture: Mapping the Terrain*, Sage, London

Maskell, P., 2001, "The Firm in Economic Geography", *Economic Geography*, vol. 77, pp. 329 – 344

Massey, D., 1995, 'The conceptualisation of place', *A Place in the World? Place, Culture and Globalisation*, Massey, D. and Jess, P. (eds), Oxford University Press, pp. 45 – 86

------ 1997, 'Economic/ Non-economic', *Geographies of Economies*, Lee, R. and Wills, J. (eds), Arnold, London, pp. 27 – 36

May, S., 2002, *Language and Minority Rights*, Pearson, Harlow

McDowell, L., 1997, 'A Tale of Two Cities? Embedded Organisations and Embodied Workers in The City of London', *Geographies of Economies*, Lee, R. and Wills, J. (eds), Arnold, London, pp. 118 – 129

McKendrick, J. L., 1999, 'Multi-Method Research: An Introduction to its Application in Population Geography', *The Professional Geographer*, vol. 51, pp. 40 – 50

Ministry of Information, Communication and the Arts, 2002, *Singapore Facts and Figures 2002*, Ministry of Information, Communications and Arts, Singapore

McSweeney, B., 2002, 'Hofstede's model of national cultural differences and their consequences: a triumph of faith – a failure of analysis', *Human Relations*, vol. 55, pp. 89 – 118

Mintz, S., 1985, *Sweetness and Power*, Penguin, NewYork

Mishler, E. G., 1991, *Research Interviewing: Context and Narrative*, Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA

Mitchell, K., 1995, 'Flexible Circulation in the Pacific Rim: Capitalisms in Cultural Context', *Economic Geography*, vol. 71, pp. 364 – 382

------   1997, 'Transnational subjects: constituting the cultural citizen in the era of Pacific Rim capital', in Ong, A. and Nonini, D (eds), *Ungrounded empires: the cultural politics of modern Chinese transnationalism*, Routledge, New York, pp. 228 – 256

Mohammad, R., 2001, "Insiders and/ or Outsiders: Positionality, theory and praxis", *Qualitative Methodologies for Geographers: Issues and Debates*, (eds) Limb, M. and Dwyer, C., Arnold, London, pp. 101 – 117

Montgomery, M., 2008, *An Introduction to Language and Society*, Routledge, London

Morgan, G., 1989, *Creative Organizational Theory*, Sage, London

Morris, C., 1946, *Signs, language and behaviour*, Prentice-Hall, Engelwood Cliffs, New Jersey

Neil, C., Kelly, P. and Yeung, H W-C., 2007, *Economic Geography: A Contemporary Introduction*, Blackwell, Oxford

Newbury, W. and Yakova, N., 2006, 'Standardization preferences: a function of national culture, work interdependence and local embeddedness', *Journal of International Business Studies*, vol. 37, pp. 44 – 60

Nonaka, I. and Konno, N., 1998, 'The concept of "ba": building a foundation for knowledge creation', *California Management Review*, vol. 40, pp. 40 – 64

Nonini, D. M., 2003, 'All are flexible, but some are more flexible than others: small-scale Chinese businesses in Malaysia', in Folk, B. C. and Jomo, K. S. (eds) *Ethnic Business: Chinese capitalism in Southeast Asia*, RoutledgeCurzon, London, pp. 73–91

Nonini, D. M. and Ong, A., 1997, 'Chinese transnationalism as an alternative modernity', in Ong, A. and Nonini, D. M. (eds), *Ungrounded Empires*, Routledge, London, pp. 3 – 33

Northouse, P. G., 2009, *Introduction to Leadership: Concepts and Practice*, Thousand Oaks, Sage

O'Donovan, G., 2006, *The Corporate Culture Handbook*, Liffey Press, Dublin

O'Sullivan, M., 2000, *Contests for Corporate Control: Corporate Governance in the United States and Germany*, Oxford University Press, Oxford

Ohmae, K., 1990, *The Borderless World: Power and Strategy In the Interlinked Economy*, Collins, London

Olds, K., 2007, 'Global assemblage: Singapore, Western universities, and the construction of a global education hub', *World Development*

Ong, A., 1999, *Flexible citizenship: the cultural logics of transnationality*, Duke University Press, Durham NC

Ong, A. and Nonini, D., 1997, (eds), *Ungrounded empires: the cultural politics of modern Chinese transnationalism* Routledge, New York

Orru, M., Biggart, N. and Hamilton, G., 1997, *The Economic Organisation of East Asian Capitalism*, Sage, London

Ouchi, W., 1981. *Theory Z: How American Business Can Meet the Japanese Challenge*, Avon Books, New York

Palen, J. J., 1986, 'Fertility and Eugenics: Singapore's Population Policies', *Population Research and Policy Review*, vol. 5, pp. 3 – 14

Panelli, R., 2004, *Social Geographies: from difference to action*, Sage, London

Parker, M., 2000, *Organizational Culture and Identity*, Sage, London

Pakir, A., 2003, 'English in Singapore', in Gopinathan, S., Pakir, A., Kam, H. W. and Saravanan, V. (eds), *Language, Society and Education in Singapore*, Eastern Universities Press, Singapore, pp. 63 – 54

Peck, J., 2005, 'Economic sociologies in space', *Economic Geography*, vol. 81, pp.129 - 74

Peebles, G. and Wilson, P., 1996, *The Singapore Economy*, Edward Elgar, London

Perrons, D., 2001, 'Towards a More Holistic Framework for Economic Geography', *Antipode*, vol. 33, pp. 208 – 215

Perry, M., Kong, L. and Yeoh, B., 1997, *Singapore: A Development State*, Wiley, England

Pheysey, C. D., 1993, *Organizational Cultures: Types and Transformations*, Routledge, London

Philip, L. J., 1998, 'Combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to social research in human geography – an impossible mixture?', *Environment and Planning A*, vol. 30, pp. 261 – 276

Potter, R. B., Binns, T., Elliot, J. A. and Smith, D., 1999, *Geographies of Development*, Prentice Hall, Harlow

Quah, J., 1988, 'Controlled Democracy, Political Stability and PAP Predominance: Government in Singapore', from (eds) Langford, J. W. and Brownsley, K. L. , *The Changing Shape of Government in the Asia Pacific Region*, The Institute for Research on Public Policy, pp. 125 – 69

Quah, S. R., 2009, 'Performing Chineseness in multicultural Singapore: a discussion on selected literary and cultural texts', *Asian Ethnicity*, vol. 10, pp. 225 – 238

Rajan, R. and Sen, R., 2002, 'Singapore's New Commercial Trade Strategy: the Pros and Cons on Bilateralism', (ed) Chang, L. L., *Perspectives on Singapore*, Times Academic Press, Singapore

Ralston, D. A., Holt, D. H., Terpstra, R. H. and Yu K. C., 2008, 'The impact of national culture and economic ideology on managerial work values: a study of the United States, Russia, Japan, and China', *Journal of International Business Studies*, vol. 39, pp. 8 – 26

Redding, S. G., 1990, *The Spirit of Chinese Capitalism*, Walter de Gruyter & Co, Berlin

------ 1995, 'Overseas Chinese networks', *Long Range Planning*, vol. 28, pp. 61-9

Redding, G. and Witt, M., 2010, *The future of Chinese Capitalism: choices and chances*, Oxford University Press

Regnier, P., 1991, *Singapore: City-State in Southeast Asia*, Hurst and Company, London

Rivera, T. C., 2003, 'The leading Chinese-Filipino business families in post-Marcos Philippines', in Folk, B. C. and Jomo, K. S., (eds) *Ethnic Business: Chinese capitalism in Southeast Asia*, RoutledgeCurzon, London, pp. 92–104

Robinson, G. M., 1998, *Methods and Techniques in Human Geography*, Wiley, England

Robison, R. and Goodman, D., S., G., 1996, 'The new rich in Asia: economic development, social status and political consciousness, in Robison, R., and Goodman, D. S. G., *The New Rich in Asia: mobile phones, McDonald's and middle-class revolution*, Routledge, London, pp. 1 – 18

Robson, C., 2002, *Real World Research*, Blackwell, Oxford

Rodan, G., 1993, 'Preserving the One-party State in Contemporary Singapore', (eds) Hewison, K., Robinson, R. and Rodan, G., *Southeast Asia in the 1990s: Authoritarianism and Democracy*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, pp. 77 – 108

------ 2001, 'Singapore: Globalisation and the Politics of Economic Restructuring', (eds) Rodan, G., Hewison, K. and Robison, R., *The Political Economy of South-East Asia*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp. 138 – 177

------ 2004, *Transparency and authoritarian rule in Southeast Asia*, Routledge, London

Rodriguez-Pose, 2001, 'Killing Economic Geography with a "Cultural Turn" Overdose', *Antipode*, vol. 33, pp. 176 – 182

Rose, G., 1997, 'Situating knowledge: positionality, reflexivities and other tactics', *Progress in Human Geography*, vol. 21, pp. 305 - 320

Roseberry, W., 1982, "Balinese cockfights and the seduction of anthropology." *Social Research*, vol. 49, pp. 1013 – 28

Rost, J. C., 1991, *Leadership for the twenty-first century*, Westport, Praeger

Sayer, A., 1992, 'Realism and geography', in *The Future of Geography*, (ed) Johnston, R., Methuen, London, pp. 159 –173

------ 1997, 'The Dialectic of Culture and Economy', *Geographies of Economies*, Lee, R. and Wills, J. (eds), Arnold, London, pp. 16 – 26

Schein, E. H., 1985, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco

------- 1992, *Organisational Culture and Leadership,* Jossey-Bass, San Francisco

------ 1996, *Strategic Pragmatism: The Culture of Singapore's Economic Development Board*, MIT Press: Cambridge, MA

------- 1999, *The Corporate Culture Survival Guide,* John Wiley and Sons, San Francisco

Schlumberger, O., 2008, 'Structural reform, economic order, and development: Patrimonial capitalism', *Review of International Political Economy*, vol. 15, pp. 622 – 649

Schoenberger, E., 1997, *The Cultural Crisis of the Firm*, Blackwell, Oxford

Scholz, C., 1987, 'Corporate Culture and Strategy', *Long Range Planning*, vol. 20, pp. 78 - 87

Schwartz, S., 1994, 'Cultural dimension of values: towards an understanding of national differences', in Kim, U., Triandis, H., Kagitcibasi, C., Choi, S. and Yoon, G. (eds), *Individualism and Collectivism: Theoretical and Methodological Issues*, Sage: Thousand Oaks, CA, pp. 85 – 119

Seligman, S. D., 1999, *Chinese Business Etiquette*, Warner Business Books, New York

Shenkar, O., 2001, 'Cultural distance revisited: towards a more rigorous conceptualisation and measurement of cultural differences', *Journal of International Business Studies*, vol. 32, pp. 519 – 535

Sia, A., 2005, *Analects of Confucius*, Asiapac Books, Singapore

Singapore Business, 1990, *Who wields the power?*, vol. 11, p. 52

Singh, K., Yoke, F. F. and Ratnam, S. S., 1991, 'A Reversal of Fertility Trends in Singapore', *Journal of Biosocial Science*, vol. 23, pp. 73 – 78

Singh, K., Viegas, O. and Ratnam, S. S., 1988, 'Fertility Trends In Singapore', *Journal of Biosocial Science*, vol. 20, pp. 401 – 409

Singh, K., Pangarkar, N. and Lim, G. S., 2001, *Business Strategy In Asia*, Thompson Learning, Singapore

Skeldon, R., 1997, 'Migrants on a global stage: the Chinese', in Rimmer, P. (ed) *Pacific Rim development: integration and globalisation in the Asia-Pacific economy*, Allen & Unwin, Canberra, pp. 222–39

Skelton, T., 2001, 'Cross-cultural research: issues of power, positionality and 'race'', in Limb, M. and Dwyer, C. (eds) *Qualitative methodologies for geographers*, Arnold, Loindon, pp. 87 - 100

Sklair, L., 2001, *The Transational Capitalist Class*, Blackwell, Oxford

Smith, P., 2002, 'Culture's consequences: something old and something new', *Human Relations*, vol. 55, pp. 119 – 135

Stacey, M., 1969, *Methods of Social Research*, Pergamon, Oxford

Straits Times Interactive (STI), 9 July 2003, "6 Local Firms on BusinessWeek List" <http://straitstimes.asia1.com.sg>

------ 16 July 2003, 'Staying Profitable in a Lunatic Industry'

------ 25 July 2003, 'Labour Chief Under Fire'

------ 26 July 2003, 'Hapless Unionist Faces Worst Experience'

------ 26 July 2003, 'Insight: Labour Pains'

------ 31 July 2003, 'NTUC picks 50 big firms to help them in wage reforms'

------ 23 Jan 2008, 'It's Singapore's gain even if 30-40% of immigrants settle here: MM Lee'

Storper, M., 1997, *The Regional World*, Guilford, New York

Storper, M. and Salais, R., 1997, *Worlds of Production*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge

Soskice, D, 1999, 'Divergent production regimes: coordinated and uncoordinated market economies in the 1980s and 1990s', in Kitschelt, H., Lange, P., Markst, G. and Stephens, J., (eds), *Continuity and Change in Contemporary Capitalism*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, pp. 101 – 34

Suryadinata, L., 2004, 'Ethnic Chinese and Nation-Building', in Suryadinata, L. (ed), *Ethnic Relations and nation-building in Southeast Asia*, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, pp. 230 – 239

------   2005, *Chinese and Nation Building in Southeast Asia*, Marshall
              Cavendish, Singapore

Tan, C., 2008a, 'Creating "good citizens" and maintaining religious harmony in Singapore', *British Journal of Religious Education*, vol. 30, pp. 133 – 142

Tan, C., 2008b, 'Globalisation, the Singapore state and educational reforms: towards performativity', *Education, Knowledge and Economy*, vol. 2, pp. 111 – 120

Tan, C-B., 2004, *Chinese Overseas: Comparative Cultural Issues*, Hong Kong University Press, Hong Kong

Tan, E. K-B., 2000, 'Success Amidst Prejudice: *Guanxi* Networks in Chinese Businesses in Indonesia and Malaysia', *Journal of Asian Business*, vol. 16, pp. 65-83

------- 2004, 'The Majority's Sacrifices and Yearnings: Chinese-Singaporeans
        and the Dilemmas of Nation-Building', in Suryadinata, L. (ed), *Ethnic
        Relations and nation-building in Southeast Asia*, Singapore: Institute of
        Southeast Asian Studies, pp. 168 – 206

Tan, S. H., 2003, 'Theoretical ideals and ideologized reality in language planning', in Gopinathan, S., Pakir, A., Ho, W. K. and Saravanan, V. (eds), *Language, Society and Education in Singapore*, Eastern Universities Press, Singapore

Tang, L. and Koveos, P., 2008, 'A framework to update Hofstede's cultural value indices: economic dynamics and institutional stability', *Journal of International Business Studies*, vol. 39, pp. 1045 – 1063

Taylor, M. and Asheim, B., 2001, 'The Concept of the Firm in Economic Geography', *Economic Geography*, vol. 77, pp. 315 - 328

Temasek Holdings Charter, 3 Jul 2002, <http://temasekholdings.com.sg>

Telecommunications Authority of Singapore Annual Report, various years

Teo, Y., 2010a, 'Asian families as sits of state politics: introduction', *Economy and Society*, vol. 39, pp. 309 – 316

------- 2010b, 'Shaping the Singapore family, producing the state and society', *Economy and Society*, vol. 39, pp. 337 – 359

Teo, P. and Yeoh, B. S. A., 1999, 'Interweaving the Public and the Private: Women's Responses to Population Policy Shifts in Singapore', *International Journal of Population Geography*, vol. 5, pp 79 – 96

The Economist, 9 March 1996, 'The Limits of Family Values'

-------- 12 Jan 2009, 'Corporate Culture Drives Radical Innovation'

Thomas, D. C., 2008, *Cross-cultural management*, Sage, London

Thompson, J. L., 2001, *Strategic Management*, Thompson Learning, London

Thrift, N., 2000, 'Performing cultures in the new economy', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, vol. 90, pp. 674-692

Thrift, N. and Olds, K., 1996, 'Refiguring the Economic in Economic Geography', *Progress in Human Geography*, vol. 20, pp 311 – 337

Trice, H. and Beyer, J., 1993, *The Cultures of Work Organizations*, Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs, NJ

Tuan, Y-F., 1993, *Passing Strange and Wonderful: Aesthetics, Nature, and Culture*, Shearwater Books, New York

Tung, R. and Verbeke, A., 2010, 'Beyond Hofstede and GLOBE: Improving the quality of cross-cultural research', *Journal of International Business Studies*, vol. 41, pp. 1259 – 1274

Tunstall, W. B., 1983, 'Cultural Transition at AT&T', *Sloan Management Review*, vol. 25, pp. 15 – 26

Valentine, G., 2005, 'Tell me about...: using interviews as a research methodology', in Flowerdew, R. and Martin, D. (eds) *Methods in Human Geography*, Pearson, Essex, pp. 110 - 127

Valentine, G., Sporton, D. and Nielsen, K. B., 2008, 'Language use on the move: sites of encounter, identities and belonging', *Transactions Institute of British Geographers*, vol. 33, pp. 376 – 387

Van Maanen, J., 1991, *Reframing Organisational Culture*, in Frost, P., Moore, L., Louis, M., Lundbert, C. and Martin, J., (eds), Sage, Beverly Hills

Wang, G., 2004, 'Chinese Ethnicity in New Southeast Asian Nations', in Suryadinata, L. (ed), *Ethnic Relations and nation-building in Southeast Asia*, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, pp. 1 – 19

Warner, M., 2003, *Culture and Management In Asia*, Routledge Curzon, London

Waters, J. L., 2005, 'Transnational family strategies and education in the contemporary Chinese diaspora', *Global Networks*, vol. 5, pp. 359 – 378

------   2006, 'Geographies of cultural capital: education, international migration and family strategies between Hong Kong and Canada', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, vol. 31, pp. 179 – 192

------   2007, 'Roundabout routes and sanctuary schools: the role of situated educational practices and habitus in the creation of transnational professionals', *Global Networks*, vol. 7, pp. 477 – 497

------   2008, *Education, Migration and Cultural Capital in the Chinese Diaspora*, Cambria, New York

Weber, M., 1951, *The Religion of China: Confucianism and Taoism*, translated and edited by Hans H. Gerth, The Free Press, New York

------   1958, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, translated by Talcott Parsons, Charles Scribner, New York

------   1968, *Economy and Society*, G. Roth and C. Wittich (eds), Bedminister Press, New York

Wee, C. J. W., 2000, 'Capitalism and ethnicity: creating local culture in Singapore', *Inter-Asia Culture Studies*, vol. 1, pp. 129 – 143

Weidenbaum, M. and Hughes, S., 1996, *The Bamboo Network*, The Free Press, New York

Westwood, R., and Lok, P., 2003, 'The Meaning of Work in Chinese Contexts: A Comparative Study', *International Journal of Cross Cultural Management*, 2003, vol. 3, pp. 139 – 164

White, G. and Wade, R., 1988, 'Developmental States and Markets in East Asia: An Introduction', *Development States in East Asia*, (eds) White, G., Macmillan Press, Institute of Development Studies, Sussex, pp. 1 – 29

Whitley, R., 1992, *Business Systems in East Asia: Firms, Markets and Societies*, Sage, London

------ 1998, 'Internationalisation and varieties of capitalism', *Review of International Political Economy*, vol. 5, pp. 445-81

------ 1999, *Divergent Capitalisms: The Social Structuring and Change of Business Systems* , Oxford University Press, Oxford

Winchester, H. P. M., 1996, 'Ethical issues in interviewing as a research method in human geography', *Australian Geographer*, vol. 27, pp. 117 – 132

Wild, J. J., Wild, K. L. and Han, J. C. Y., 2010, *International Business*, Pearson, Harlow

Williams, R., 1977. *Marxism and Literature*, Oxford University Press, Oxford

Williamson, O. E., 1985, *The Economic Institution of Capitalism*, The Free Press, New York

Wills, J. and Lee, R., 1997, Introduction, *Geographies of Economies*, Lee, R. and Wills, J. (eds), Arnold, London, pp. xv – xviii

Witt, M. and Redding, G., 2009, 'Culture, meaning, and institutions: Executive rationale in Germany and Japan', *Journal of International Business Studies*, vol. 40, pp. 859 – 885

Wong, S-L., 1995, 'Business networks, cultural values and the state in Hong Kong and Singapore', in Rajeswary, A. B., (ed.), *Chinese Business Entreprise in Asia*, Routledge, London, pp. 136-53

World Trade Organisation (WTO), *International Trade Statistics*, 2001, Geneva WTO

Wu, J., 1998, *The Chinese Code of Success: Maxims by Zhu Zi*, Asiapac, Singapore

Xu., D., Chew, C. H. And Chen, S., 2003, 'Language use and language attitudes in the Singapore Chinese Community', in Gopinathan, S., Pakir, A., Kam, H. W. and Saravanan, V. (eds), *Language, Society and Education in Singapore*, Eastern Universities Press, Singapore, pp. 133 – 154

Yan, J. and Sorensen, R., 2006, 'The effect of Confucian values on succession in family business', *Family Business Review*, vol. 19, pp. 235 – 250

Yan, Y, 2002, 'Managed Globalisation: State Power and Cultural Transition in China', Berger, P. L. and Huntington, S. P., (eds), *Many Globalisations*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp. 19 - 47

Yao, S., 2003, 'The cultural limits of "Confucian capitalism": power and the invention of the family among Chinese traders in Sarawak', in Folk, B. C. and Jomo, K. S. (eds) *Ethnic Business: Chinese capitalism in Southeast Asia*, RoutledgeCurzon, London, pp. 52 – 72

Ye, J. and Kelly, P. F., 2011, 'Cosmopolitanism at work: Labour market exclusion in Singapore's financial sector', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, vol. 37, pp. 691 – 707

Yeo, G., 1998, *Speak Mandarin Campaign*, Speech delivered 12 September 1998

Yeoh, B., and Willis, K., 2005, 'Singaporean and British transmigrant in China and the cultural politicis of "contact zones"', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, vol. 31, pp. 269 – 285

Yeung, H. W-C., 1994, 'Critical reviews of geographical perspectives on business organizations and the organization of production: towards a network approach', *Progress in Human Geography*, vol. 18, pp. 460 – 490

------ 1998a, 'The social-spatial constitution of business organizations: a geographical perspective', *Organization*, vol. 5, pp. 101 – 128

------ 1998b, 'Capital, state and space: contesting the borderless world', *Transactions Institute British Geographers*, vol. 23, pp. 291 – 309

------ 2000, 'The dynamics of Asian business systems in a globalising era', *Review of International Political Economy*, vol. 7, pp. 399 – 433

------ 2001, 'Does Economic Matter for/in Economic Geography?', *Antipode*, vol. 33, pp. 168 - 175

------ 2003, 'Practicing New Economic Geographies: A Methodological

Examination', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, vol. 93, pp. 442 – 462

------ 2004, *Chinese Capitalism in a Global Era: Towards Hybrid Capitalism*, Routledge, London

------ 2009, 'Transnational corporations, global production networks, and urban regional development: A geographer's perspective on *Multinational Enterprises and the Global Economy*', *Growth and Change*, vol. 40, pp. 197 – 226

Yeung, H. W-C. and Lin, G. C. S., 2003, 'Theorizing Economic Geographies of Asia', *Economic Geography*, vol. 79, pp. 107 - 128

Yeung, H. W-C. And Olds, K., (eds), 2000, *Globalisation of Chinese Business Firms*, Macmillan, London

Appendix A: Interview and observation schedule

Schedule 2006

	Interviews	(Participant) Observation
June	8 (GLC, govt officials)	-
July	15 (GLC)	3 weeks (GLC)
August	16 (SME)	3 weeks (SME)
September	16 (MNC)	3 weeks (MNC)
October	5 (govt officials)	-
Total	**60**	**9 weeks**

Interview Structure:

Thank you very much for participating in this interview.

The session will be tape recorded.

Please feel free to clarify any of the questions at any time.

You can choose to respond in any languages or dialects.

You can choose not to respond to any of the questions.

You can choose to remain anonymous.

(Start tape recorder)

Interview Questions:

1. What style of management do you see yourself practising? In what ways West/ Asian/ Chinese/ Singaporean?

2. Which language or dialect (or combination) do you use with your colleagues and clients? Why?

3. How important is the government's "Speak Mandarin" campaign? Does it affect your work environment? Does it have any effect at all?

4. Who are your main contacts in your workplace?

5. What sort of places are you most likely to socialise/ entertain/ dine with your colleagues and clients? How has it changed over the years?

6. Who will stay late and why? Is that the way you think managers in the West or Asia work?

7. How different do you see yourself from the non-Singaporeans?

8. What is the significance of National Service to the corporate environment?

9. What are your main references for your style of management? For example, your University degree, travelling experience, MBAs, ongoing courses, etc.

10. What sort of management/ self-help books (if any) do you usually refer to?

11. How often do you source for new materials to improve your management style?

12. What is your opinion of corporate culture?

13. What is your opinion of the corporate culture in your workplace?

14. Who is responsible for moulding the corporate culture at your workplace?

15. Do you think it is the same in all the branches/ departments of your company?

16. What is your opinion of corporate culture in other types of companies? MNCs, GLCs, SMEs?

17. Who are your mentors?

18. Who do you trust and confide in when you face any difficulty at work?

19. Do you think trade unions influence corporate culture?

20. What is the significance of a trade union to you?

21. What is your opinion towards foreign media's coverage of the typical Singaporean?

22. What is your opinion towards local media's coverage of the typical Singaporean?

23. What is *guanxi*?

24. How important is *guanxi* in your working life?

25. Do you belong to any country clubs?

26. How do you explain Singapore's progress and prosperity?

End of interview

(Stop tape recorder)

How differently would you have answered some of the questions if this interview was not taped?

Appendix B   Consent Form for Interviews

THE UNIVERSITY
of LIVERPOOL

Statement of Informed Consent and Permission to Use Information

Asian Economic Geographies:

Corporate Culture in Singapore

Department of Geography

University of Liverpool

Researcher: NG Kwei Raye

The purpose of this agreement is to ensure that your contribution to the above research project and any subsequent usage is in strict accordance with your wishes.

I give my permission for the interview, which I have given for the above project, to be used for research purposes only (including research publications and reports) with strict preservation of anonymity.

I hereby assign the copyright in my contribution to   NG Kwei Raye
                                                      (Researcher)

Signature...   Date.......................

Address..

....

Contact number...........................

Signature...............................   (Researcher)

Date.....................................

Appendix C   Consent Form for Observation

THE UNIVERSITY
of LIVERPOOL

Statement of Informed Consent and Permission to Use Information

Asian Economic Geographies:

Corporate Culture in Singapore

Department of Geography
University of Liverpool
Researcher: NG Kwei Raye

The purpose of this agreement is to ensure that your contribution to the above research project and any subsequent usage is in strict accordance with your wishes.

I understand that notes will be taken and audio recording will be used throughout the participation observation process.

I understand that names will not be revealed in any speech, memo or report.

I understand that the name of the organisation will not be revealed unless permitted by the organisation.

I understand that the researcher is responsible to abide by this confidentiality agreement.

I have had the project explained to me and I have been given an opportunity to ask whatever questions I may have had and all such questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

I further understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and terminate my participation at any time.

Signature..
Date.........................
Address...
....
Contact number............................
Signature................................   (Researcher)
Date...

Appendix D

The People at Merlion (GLC)

Total Employed	500
Chinese	400
Malay	60
Indian	40

The people featured in this section were those that I had the most contact with. They were the key players in shaping and forming the corporate culture I was trying to observe in this particular GLC. Activities ranged from office premises routines to corporate-social functions.

<u>Mr Tan, President</u>
Age: 50 yrs old
Position: President
Sex: Male
Race: Chinese
Languages spoken: English, Mandarin
Dialects spoken: Hokkien, Cantonese, Teochew
Education background: BA (Singapore), MBA (Australia)

Mr Tan is a very outspoken and charismatic leader. He is very approachable and knows most of his employees by name. He is also a Lieutenant Colonel in the army and a government scholar. He had been with GLCs since he started his career. (It is 'common knowledge' that only scholars, especially military ranked personnel, can hold top positions in GLCs. It is also common practice for military-ranked personnel to be on the Board of Directors in GLCs.)

<u>Mr Seah</u>
Age: 46 yrs old
Position: Vice-President
Sex: Male
Race: Chinese
Languages spoken: English, Mandarin
Dialects spoken: Hokkien, Teochew
Education background: BA (Singapore), MBA (UK)

Mr Seah is a quiet man. He is a government scholar. He is also a Major in the army. Mr Seah is the second-in-charge to Mr Tan. He is quite popular amongst the staff due to his approachability. His name comes out often in conversations, from queries related to work to invitations to lunches.

<u>Elaine</u>
Age: 50 yrs old
Position: Human Resource Director
Sex: Female
Race: Chinese
Languages spoken: English, Mandarin

Dialects spoken: Hokkien
Education background: BA (Australia)

Elaine overseas all the HR activities in the company. She reports to the President and Vice-President. She is seen as the affectionate 'big sister' in the company as she handles all the HR issues. She is often referred to as the elder sister in Chinese folk tales. Elaine perceived by the employees as a dignified HR Director who is fluent in English and also very well-versed in Mandarin.

Jess
Age: 36 yrs old
Position: HR Manager
Sex: Female
Race: Chinese
Languages spoken: English, Mandarin
Dialects spoken: Hokkien, Cantonese
Education background: BA (Singapore)

Jess is often seen as the 'little sister', after Elaine the HR Director. Most of the junior staff goes to her to discuss any HR issues and Jess. When the issue is beyond her, Elaine will be involved, if not, Elaine will just be informed of the situation. Jess completed her Bachelor degree in Singapore and majored in HR. She intends to pursue her MBA in the near future in Singapore Institute of Management. She often takes the role of event management of internal training affairs. Many employees will have direct contact with her.

Steven
Age: 33 yrs old
Position: Marketing Manager
Sex: Male
Race: Chinese
Languages spoken: English, Mandarin
Dialects spoken: Hokkien, Cantonese, Teochew
Education background: BA (Singapore)

Steven is a very well-travelled manager. He has experience in the UK and Southeast Asia markets. He graduated from the National University of Singapore. He is currently pursuing a part-time MBA. Steven comes from the Express stream and a local government school. The competition between him and Tess is the most obvious. Steven is seen as the locally bred manager and Tess is perceived as the 'Westernised' Singaporean who struggles to maintain her identity but is very successful in her professional work.

Peter
Age: 43 yrs old
Position: Marketing Director
Sex: Male
Race: Chinese
Languages spoken: English, Mandarin
Dialects spoken: Hokkien, Teochew

Education background: BA (Australia), MBA (USA)

Peter handles a section of the marketing department. He oversees clients in USA, Europe and Southeast Asia. Peter started as a junior officer in this company and has been with the same company since. He has been groomed by the past Presidents of the company due to his loyalty. He is perceived as the older brother of the marketing managers.

Tess
Age: 30 yrs old
Position: Marketing Manager
Sex: Female
Race: Chinese
Languages spoken: English, Mandarin
Dialects spoken: Hokkien, Cantonese, Teochew, Hakka
Education background: BA (UK), MBA (Australia)

Tess is a high-flying marketing manager. She has been sponsored to do her MBA by the company as she has accomplished her 12 month targets within 3 months in the last 3 years of her employment in the company. Her projects are in Europe and in Southeast Asia. She completed her University education (BA) in London. She comes from a convent school and from the Special stream. Although she speaks very good English, she also speaks good Mandarin. This enables her to mix well with the China nationals in the company as well as the clients from China. The client base in China is expanding rapidly and her involvement in all the new projects has created some tension between herself and her peers. She is often challenged by (competing) peers on her identity as a Singaporean Chinese woman.

Loraine
Age: 38 yrs old
Position: Marketing Manager
Sex: Female
Race: Chinese
Languages spoken: English, Mandarin
Dialects spoken: Hokkien
Education background: BA (Singapore), MBA (Singapore)

Loraine has experience in both multinational companies and GLCs. She is one of the three women marketing managers in the company. She spends a lot of time, professionally, in USA and Southeast Asia. She has her MBA from Singapore Management School and her BA is from National University of Singapore. She has great presence in the office and commands respect from both her junior and senior members of staff.

Eugene
Age: 39 yrs old
Position: Business Development Manager
Sex: Male
Race: Chinese
Languages spoken: English, Mandarin

315

Dialects spoken: Hokkien, Cantonese
Education background: BA (Singapore), MBA (Australia)

Eugene completed his BA Business in National University of Singapore. His MBA is from Australia National University. He now oversees business development in China. He has a rich experience in dealing with clients and employees from China.

Hai
Age: 33 yrs old
Position: Design Engineer
Sex: Male
Race: Chinese
Languages spoken: English, Mandarin
Dialects spoken: Hokkien, Cantonese, Teochew
Education background: Diploma Engineering (Singapore), BA (Australia), PhD (UK)

Hai has a PhD (Birmingham, UK) in engineering. He has been with the company for 5 years. He provided substantial information on the dynamics between the Chinese nationals and Indian nationals in the company. He is not part of the marketing team and thus have no interest in the politics of the marketing section. He enjoys his work and collaborates with anyone who is interested in his work. So, which ever marketing team needs his help, he's there to meet their needs. His loyalty lies in his job satisfaction and not with the marketing managers. He is thus a good source of information on the dynamics of the marketing teams.

The People at Quantum (MNC)

Total Employed	**250**
Singaporeans	200
Non-Singaporeans	50
Chinese	180
Caucasian	47
Malay	15
Indian	8

Arthur
Age: 40 yrs old
Position: Deputy Director
Sex: Male
Race: Chinese
Languages spoken: English, Mandarin, French
Dialects spoken: Hokkien, Cantonese, Teochew
Education background: Economics (Australia), MBA (UK)

Arthur can be seen as the conductor of the company. He orchestrates the various departments and is directly involved with the ten accounts team leaders. He is a key player in moulding the corporate culture in this office. Together with his managers, they set the targets for the marketing and sales team who have to hit the target within the time frame. Arthur practises the "hire and fire style" of management. He claims he is "nothing of the traditional, bureaucracy or governmental sort of things." He thrives in a dynamic environment and believes that one must be able to adapt and change according to the environment. From this glass-walled office, he can have a full view of the whole office floor and everyone can also see his gesticulations during his meetings. He sets the general mood in the office. The office workers look up to his 'performance' and conduct their work accordingly. If he is full of praise, the words spread round and the office is not as tensed.

Having been educated in Singapore, Australia, Britain and worked in Paris and London, he tries to influence his hybrid style of management in the company. This can be seen in his approach in internal meetings, informal conversations with other office workers and from the telephone conversations with other colleagues (both local and foreign). In his own words, his own influence is from his development both in Singapore and overseas. Being the conformist in Singapore due to the political climate and combining it with the creativity from the West.

Lim Moilin
Age: 30
Position: Regional Accounts Manager
Sex: Female
Race: Chinese
Education background: Accounting (Malaysia), MBA (Singapore)

Languages spoken: English, Mandarin, Melayu Behasa, Thai, Korean
Dialect spoken: Hokkien, Cantonese, Teochew

Moilin is a Malaysian Chinese. She used to work in the Kuala Lumpur branch and was handpicked to the Singapore branch several years ago. She is a very professional manager and is always punctual and 'buzzing' in the office area. Many officers come to ask her for advise throughout the day. She also gets numerous overseas phone calls regarding accounts set-up procedures. She is obviously a key attribute to the company. She is also very well connected with the clients in SEA, especially with her language abilities.

Cecilia
Age: 45 yrs old
Position: Administrator
Sex: Female
Race: Chinese
Education background: Diploma (Singapore)
Languages spoken: English, Melayu Behasa
Dialect spoken: Hokkien, Teochew

I am not sure if I can label Cecilia as a Westernised Chinese lady but from the way she carries herself in the office, she is certainly not a conservative (traditional) lady. She does not speak Singlish and is well travelled. She has also worked in Reston and Sydney. She used to be an operations manager and decided to take a pay cut to settle for a less stressful job in the same company. She believes in keeping up society but at the same time, preserving some of the good Asian virtues.

Elmas Lee
Age: 33
Position: Accounts Manager
Sex: Male
Race: Chinese
Education background: Accounting (Singapore)
Language spoken: English, Mandarin
Dialect spoken: Hokkien

Elmas can be described as a typical Singaporean male office worker. He does not challenge much in the office and completes his daily tasks dutifully. He is very approachable and after a week, I discovered that he does have many opinions but he just does not share it with his colleagues. He thinks that it is 'pointless' whatever he says and there will be minimal impact.

Smitha
Age: 38 yrs old
Position: Regional HR Manager
Sex: Female
Race: Indian

Education background: International Relations (USA), MBA (USA)
Language spoken: English, Hindi and German
Dialect spoken: None

Smitha is a very dynamic and feisty HR manager. She fits the bill of a New York City top manager. She is very fashionable and is very well spoken. She comes from a privileged background and she acknowledges it. She plays a major role in the hiring process of top managers in the SEA region. She travels extensively to conduct interviews and to 'head-hunt' talent for the company.

Alan
Age: 26 yrs old
Position: HR Manager
Sex: Male
Race: Caucasian (Australian)
Education background: Economics and Marketing (Australia)
Language spoken: English
Dialect spoken: None

Alan is a junior HR manager and has recently joined the Singapore branch. He is shadowing Smitha and learning the ropes in the HR industry. He is ambitious and dreams of opening his own HR agency one day. He is open with his opinions and this is a rare in Singapore.

 Chris
Age: 32
Position: Regional HR Manager
Sex: Male
Race: Caucasian (American)
Education background: Business and International Relations (USA)
Language spoken: English, German
Dialect spoken: Non

Chris has been working in Singapore for the past 2 years. His children go to the International American School in Singapore. His wife is a school teacher in a private school. He travels extensively between Singapore and USA for business and is responsible for sending local managers to USA for further training. He also conducts his own training courses within the company in SEA. He leads a very active expatriate lifestyle in Singapore; luxury condominium in the River Valley area, holds country club memberships – Pinetree and American Club, company luxury car and never eat in a local food court.

Neena
Position: Accounts secretary
Age: 25
Race: Malay
Gender: Female
Education background: Diploma , Local polytechnic
Language spoken: English and *Malayu Bahasa*
Dialect spoken: None

Neena is a very soft spoken secretary in the company. After completing her diploma, she first started work as a marketing team member but discovered that it was not her preferred job. She feels she is more of a 'background' worker and prefers to have a supporting role in her job. Although soft spoken, she is also very fashionable in her attire. She does not wear the traditional head-dress (*tudong*) at work. She listens to modern pop music (both in Malay and English).

Selena
Position: HR Officer
Age: 26
Race: Malay
Gender: Female
Education background: Diploma, Local polytechnic
Language spoken: English and *Malayu Bahasa*
Dialect spoken: None

Selena is also a soft spoken worker in this company. She is very comfortable not being part of the majority group of the department and enjoys her own space at work. She does not wear the head-dress (*tudong*) and is also very fashionable in her attire.

Chiping
Position: Senior Accounts Manager
Age: 32
Languages spoken: English, Mandarin
Dialects spoken: Teochew, Hokkien, Cantonese
Rank in National Service: Major
Education Background: Certified Public Accountant (UK and Singapore), Msc Finance (UK)

Chiping is a senior accounts manager. He programs and looks after all the accounts in Arthur's team. He also re-adjustments all audits of the department and prepare the accounts to be ready for inspection by external auditors. As he previously worked for a blue-chip company and government accounts department, his expertise is invaluable. He is a confidante of Arthur and other senior managers. He is seen as fair but he does have his opinions of the company which he prefers to share with non-colleagues.

Appendix F

The People at Dayton Multimedia (SME)

Total Employed	80
Chinese	70
Malay	4
Indian	4
Caucasian	2

Tan Kah Wee
Position: Director
Age: 42
Race: Chinese
Gender: Male
Education background: Diploma (local polytechnic), BA (Australia), MBA (UK)
Language spoken: English and Chinese
Dialects spoken: Hokkien, Cantonese, Teochew

Wee is the founder of this SME company. Dayton Multimedia is his second SME and he spends his time between the two office premises. He has a very personal touch in his management style and always has time to speak to all his employees. Wee seems to be a very 'down to earth' Director. He often gathers the team in the informal meeting room for quick coffee break and update one another on the progress of their projects. There is always good banter between Wee and his team.

James Chua
Position: Creative Director
Age: 45
Race: Chinese
Gender: Male
Education background: Diploma (local polytechnic)
Languages spoken: English, Mandarin and *Malayu Bahasa*
Dialect spoken: Hokkein, Cantonese, Teochew

James is the creative drive behind most of the projects. His style of motivating the team was to encourage them to think outside the box and move away from conformity. However, what is interesting is the language and way in which he motivates them to be non-conform was rather 'localised'; using military jargon and common cultural (Chinese) references.

Mel Kuek
Position: HR Manager
Age: 32
Race: Chinese
Gender: Female
Education background: BA (local University)
Language spoken: English and Mandarin
Dialect spoken: Hokkien

Mel is a very outspoken HR manager. She likes gather the employees for a coffee break and just catch up with them on their work. She also regularly asks them what she and her team can do to further support the team in their projects. Mel appears to be very well liked by the employees and they often call her *da jie*, which means big sister in Mandarin.

Jacqueline Ng
Position: Accounts Director
Age: 36
Race: Chinese
Gender: Female
Education background: BA (local University), MBA (Australia)
Language spoken: English and Mandarin
Dialect spoken: Teochew, Hokkien

Jacqueline appears to be very quiet but holds the finance of the company well. At meetings, Wee and James always refer to her for the update on figures and motivate the teams to complete their targets in good time. Also, when discussing about company holidays (or away days), Wee got Jacqueline to give a short presentation on the finance of the company and then announce to the teams where they will be taken for the company days.

Carolyn Leong
Position: Creative Director
Age: 43
Race: Chinese
Gender: Female
Education background: BA (local University)
Language spoken: English and Mandarin
Dialect spoken: Cantonese

Carolyn appears as rather 'eccentric'. This is reflected in the clothes she wears and her hairstyle. However, she is also very 'traditional' in some of her attitudes at work, often using Confucius sayings to illustrate her point. She likes to be seen having meetings at 'Western' cafes such as Starbucks and Costa but only consume 'Eastern' food.

Daniel Tung
Position: Marketing Manager
Age: 34
Race: Chinese
Gender: Male
Education background: BA (local University)
Language spoken: English and Mandarin
Dialect spoken: Teochew, Hokkien

Daniel is a very outspoken marketing manager. He holds the highest number of successful bids in Dayton Multimedia. He is also very active in his national reservist service and often brings experience and network from those activities into his professional life.

Steven
Position: Senior Marketing Manager
Age: 45
Race: Chinese
Gender: Male
Education background: BA (local University)
Language spoken: English and Mandarin
Dialect spoken: Cantonese, Teochew, Hokkien

Steve is a well-respected senior marketing manager amongst his colleagues. The team leaders and marketing team go to him for work and personal advice. He is very approachable and charismatic senior manager.