A port city in search of a hinterland

Over the centuries, Singapore has continued to define and redefine its hinterland. This fluid, restless search for a "hinterland"—or economic space—has fascinated the Singapore of today.

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For The Straits Times

While Singapore's economic development has sometimes been understood as policy scholars and economists as a matter of governance and strategic direction by the state, a historical overview would show that the underlying story of Singapore's economic story has stayed constant over hundreds of years. Its prosperity has always been due to its ability to find and adapt to shifting hinterlands.

From the 16th to the early 19th centuries, in the hinterland was based, covering much of its time South-east Asia, surrounded by Britain's foreign policy. The British were keen to maintain their naval power in the region, which was essential for their trade with China. After 1880, the situation changed again.

Since the 1980s, Singapore has been a "hinterland" of Southeast Asia, with its economy and society intertwined with that of the region. Much of its economic success, especially in the early years, is due to the region's strategic location. The city-state has become an international financial center and a hub for trade and finance.

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In its earliest incarnations, the relationship between Singapore and its hinterland was defined by its role as a key international financial center, and its position as a hub for trade and finance. In its present incarnation, the relationship is defined by its role as an international financial center and a hub for trade and finance.

The port city also became a centre of cultural and political movements — a dynamic force for social change. This experience was common in other colonial port cities such as Hong Kong and Penang, similarly oriented communities that helped to shape a vibrant, Asian public sphere.

Throughout Singapore's history, Singaporeans have continued to redefine their hinterland. This fluid, restless search for a "hinterland"—or economic space—has fascinated the Singapore of today. Let me explain.

The hinterland of Singapore

What is special about the economy of a port city? To begin with, they have an inherent productivity - they are not merely "Chinese that work near the shoreline"; they are economic engines whose economies are maritime in nature.

As nodes of their own trading networks, they are open to the flux of goods and people, a rich blend of social, cultural and political connections. As a result, a natural cosmopolitanism.

As a result, Singapore has become a centre for in multinational companies, of Chinese diaspora intellectual and political influence, and of international debates on cultural and religious reformations.

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