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'Central' Singapore Island, 'Peripheral' Mainland Johor: making the link

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A Special Case?

This chapter focuses on the case of Singapore, the island (and now city state) that lies at the southern tip of the Malayan peninsula, and the Malaysian State of Johor on the mainland (Figure # *which will be a map of this vicinity*). These two territories were first connected by a fixed link in 1923 when a causeway of just over one kilometre in length was completed, providing both road and rail links. This case stands in marked contrast to many others discussed in this book in that many of the familiar island and mainland roles are reversed. In particular, changes associated with improved transport links between the two places, including the causeway fixed link early in the 20th Century, were more dramatic for the more 'peripheral' mainland in southern Johor than for the more 'central' island, Singapore.

Interpreting this case hinges on tensions inherent in islandness ideas. There is surprisingly little consensus, as Hay (2006) points out, but most notions of islandness go far beyond literal conceptions to focus on various qualities that emerge from the limited transport connections and clearly defined boundaries that are common to many islands. Qualities that are widely emphasized include being bounded, small in scale, separate, hard edged (yet open to flows of various kinds), remote, peripheral, detached, and isolated (yet paradoxically often well-connected). Such qualities have been seen as resulting in social and other consequences, including intensified local interactions, being more prone to the effects of externalities, conscious of an island identity and of uniqueness (Biagini & Hoyle, 1999; Royle, 2001). While many have traditionally

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emphasized limitations and vulnerabilities associated with islandness, more recently others highlight resilience, opportunities and advantages (Baldacchino, 2004).

While extended islandness notions vary in which qualities are most emphasized, of particular interest here, given Singapore's clear status as a central place, is the extent to which remoteness and peripherality are seen as important. Hay (2006) points to a number of 'faultlines' within constructions of islandness but the role of peripherality was not one of them. In practice, island studies, of which Royle (2001) is an exemplar, tend to focus on islands that are remote and peripheral and often seem to quietly wish away islands that are also central places. The apparent anomaly of such islands is sometimes sidestepped by questioning their literal islandness, since many, including Singapore, have long since been provided with fixed links to a mainland (for example see Biagini and Hoyle, 1999: 7-8). However, this case cannot so easily be swept aside and instead forces us to confront whether it is reasonable to see peripherality as a key aspect of the notion of islandness.

This case also provides insights into what characteristics are required for bridge effects to appear. If we find impacts on the mainland that are akin to bridge effects it might suggest that islandness is not a necessary condition. A lack of bridge effects on the island side, if the island does indeed possess islandness, would suggest that islandness is not a sufficient condition either. Therefore much depends on whether we can acknowledge Singapore's islandness (in more extended senses) despite its centrality. The case raises further related questions. If islandness is neither sufficient nor necessary, do we need to look to more specific qualities, such as perhaps peripherality and/or isolation, in any search for the pre-conditions for bridge effects?

The rest of this chapter looks at the Singapore-Johor case in more detail with the aim of offering further insights on these conceptual issues. The nature and significance of Singapore's islandness and its relationship with Johor on the mainland have been through a number of distinct phases. These provide an organising structure for the discussion.

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Although the causeway fixed link opened in 1923, it is useful to extend the discussion further back in history, beginning in the early 19th Century, as well as forward to events of recent decades. The secondary historical literature on Singapore and Johor will be the main source for the discussion.

'The Sea Unites'

Singapore's early 19th century emergence as both island and centre of economic and political power had many precedents, including both colonial and local indigenous ones. In Europe, obvious comparisons are Venice at its height, Copenhagen and the old part of Stockholm. In the first several centuries of European colonialism, there were many similar examples of islands 'used as relatively secure bases for the development of trade, transport and colonial settlement' (Hoyle, 1999: 142). These include the islands of Montreal and Manhattan in North America, Gorée, Lagos island and Bioko (formerly Fernando Po) in West Africa, Zanzibar and Mombassa island in East Africa, Malta in the Mediterranean, Hong Kong island prior to the addition of the New Territories, and Penang off the west coast of what is now peninsular Malaysia (Hoyle, 1999; Royle, 2001: 45-46). In the era of sail, such islands had the advantage of being both accessible by the primary international mode of transportation and, for a naval power at least, generally more easily defended than mainland sites (although of course various mainland sites served a similar purpose). At least initially, most of these examples were remote from centres of influence and close to mainlands that were clearly 'peripheral'.

Islands as economic, political and cultural centres were also common in pre-colonial times in the vicinity of the Straits of Malacca. Like Scandinavia in the Dark Ages and Ancient Greece, insular Southeast Asia is a region where historically the maxim 'the land divides, the sea unites' carried considerable validity (Fisher, 1964). Being an island was no obstacle to hosting a successful entrepot. Indeed, historians now emphasize continuity with the past in Singapore's rapid success after its establishment in 1819, in contrast with

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colonial accounts that emphasized its novelty (Trocki, 2006). Early colonial Singapore was heir to a long series of earlier, Malay-ruled entrepots in the region with island, estuarine or riverine locations – that included Srivijaya in Sumatra over 1,000 years ago, and Malacca on the Malayan Peninsula in the 15th Century. Island sites included Singapore itself in the 14th Century and a number of entrepot centres of the Johor Riau Sultanate of the 16th to 18th centuries, especially (several times) the island of Bintan in the Riau archipelago near Singapore. Each of these had prospered based on a similar model of statecraft in which a strong ruler established the peace, order and legal framework at a strategic location to which merchants could then confidently gather to transact trade, thereby facilitating a confluence of trade routes (Andaya and Andaya, 2001).

Control of such a shipping hub and its approaches was far more important than land, making strategically located islands and estuaries the most successful locations for these trading ports. Although forest products were an important part of the trade passing through these entrepots, control of the territory from which such products came was not necessary. The forest-covered land around the Malacca Straits and Riau was (and is) poorly suited to intensive agriculture. Plantation agriculture of perennials had yet to find significant success here and the shifting cultivation practiced by indigenous groups offered little scope for control or profit by local rulers. Just as importantly, travel (or indeed the creation of paths, much less roads) through the dense and often marshy forest was extremely difficult using the technology of the times, and remained so until the 20th Century (Kaur, 1978; Lake, 1894).

In the first decades following Britain's acquisition of Singapore in 1819, its development depended primarily on the seaborn entrepot trade. With a more strategic location for international trade, especially the Indonesian archipelago and the flourishing opium and textile trade between India and China, Singapore quickly outshone the longer established ports in the straits, overtaking Penang's trade as early as 1822 (Lim, 1978: 162). This was despite the other ports' better proximity to local mainland natural resources such as tin

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mining areas and further underlines Singapore's initial aloofness from its immediate mainland (Lim, 1978).

Rapid urban and mercantile development in Singapore contrasted with mainland Johor, which was extremely sparsely populated (until late in the 19th Century) mainly by small Malay farming and fishing communities on riverine sites, especially along the Johor and Muar Rivers, and by a number of aboriginal (*Orang Asli*) groups in both coastal and upland communities, making a living from combinations of fishing, hunting, gathering of ocean and forest products, trade, raiding, and shifting cultivation. The only town of significance was Muar, in the north near Malacca (Trocki, 1979: 41).

Between 1819 and the 1860s, the Malay political figures who claimed Johor as part of their domain resided in Singapore, not the mainland. Two different families from the court of the Johor Riau Sultanate played a role in Britain's acquisition of Singapore and then sought to preserve and enhance their wealth and prestige in the new circumstances. It was the family of heirs to the Johor Riau office of *Temenggong* who emerged as the key Malay political and economic actors in the emerging entrepot, eventually to become the royal family of what is now the Malaysian State of Johor. However, until the middle of the 19th century, they perceived their opportunities to be in Singapore, not the mainland; in fact, they found little on the mainland worth ruling over at that time (Trocki, 1979). They apparently hoped to continue to profit from Singapore's entrepot trade in a similar manner to their previous roles in the Riau polity and for two decades succeeded to an extent (Trocki, 2006).

To summarize and draw links between this account of events and the theoretical concerns of the chapter, it is hard not to see significant islandness in early colonial Singapore. In these early decades, the mainland was almost completely irrelevant to Singapore's development as an entrepot, except as a barrier to shipping and hence as a factor in making Singapore's location a strategic one. For several decades there was little

interaction with the nearby mainland. This suggests that its islandness at this time goes beyond the merely literal sense of being surrounded by water. To illustrate this point, it is easy to imagine that during this period the British-run entrepot could have successfully been located much further from the mainland, on Bintan perhaps. Early colonial Singapore was literally an island, small in scale, clearly bounded and in a sense remote (in requiring a considerable sea journey to be reached from the nearest significant centres). However, it was clearly not peripheral, having suddenly 'moved' from periphery to centre stage, as many entrepots before it had done. Contemplating the Singapore of 1840 (or indeed the Zanzibar or Hong Kong of the same date) makes it seem problematic to require peripherality as a key aspect of the notion of islandness.

Connections with the Mainland Become More Important

From the middle of the 19th Century, control of and access to the mainland gradually became more important to the political economy of the Malacca Straits region. Singapore had emerged as a central place at a time when being an island was no handicap. However, accelerating economic developments in Johor that were very much influenced by and dominated from Singapore eventually prompted the need for a fixed link to the mainland.

The beginnings of a new premium on control of land territory emerged initially through cultivation in Singapore of the cash crops of pepper and gambier, which had come to be undertaken by Chinese immigrants (Trocki, 1979). Colonial Singapore thus gradually became a regional exchange for labour, mainly Chinese, controlled by Chinese entrepreneurs (Trocki, 2006). From the 1840s, the Malay *Temenggong* line gradually turned its attention to its domain in mainland Johor, initially because of the emergence of gutta percha (a rubber-like forest product found in Johor and the wider region) as a valuable commodity. The spillover of Singapore's gambier and pepper industry into the river valleys of the southern tip of Johor and also provided the *Temenggong* family with an opportunity for a stream of revenue (Trocki, 1979: 88-89).

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These developments made control of Johor mainland territory an asset for the first time to its Malay rulers. In 1855 the *Temenggong* established a new administrative settlement at Tanjung Putri on the mainland, across the Tebrau Straits from Woodlands in Singapore (to which it would later be linked by the causeway). In 1858, the son and heir of the *Temenggong* moved most of the government offices for the administration of their Johor territory from Singapore to Tanjung Puteri, later renamed Johor Bahru (Trocki, 1979: 111). In the decades that followed, plantation agricultural development expanded under mainly Chinese and European entrepreneurs, who were based in Singapore.

By the early 20th Century, the British had also significantly expanded and consolidated their economic and then political interests in mainland Malaya. They had extended their control to most of the Malay States on the western side of the Peninsula, known as the Federated Malay States (FMS) (Andaya and Andaya, 2001). Johor however remained independent under Sultan Abu Bakar and then his son, Sultan Ibrahim, until 1914. The early 20th Century saw the explosive emergence of the rubber industry and a concerted push to rapidly expand rail links and roads to serve it. Despite Johor's independence, the colonial authorities, centred primarily in Singapore, played a key role in this push. Johor's leaders rightly feared that colonial authority would soon follow. Abu Bakar's successor, Sultan Ibrahim therefore tried to get backers to develop the rail line through Johor himself but was unsuccessful (Kaur, 1985: 55-56). In 1904 he was forced to agree to the rail line being built under British control and it opened in 1909, ending at Johor Bahru. This rail line was connected with Singapore's line to Woodlands via a railcar ferry. British political control of Johor followed in 1914. The causeway project was quickly proposed in 1917 and was complete by 1923.

Even before British control, British capital, including interests of the Governor of Singapore himself, had been key players in opening the inland swathe of land along the rail line to rubber planting (Kaur, 1985: 55-58). In the period between the coming of rail

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and the opening of the causeway, rural development in Johor accelerated, stimulating the development of new inland towns, such as Kluang and a little later Segamat, both well established by 1920. Leinbach's (1975) study of road network development in Malaya provides insight into the geography and timing of agricultural development in Johor. Until 1898, roads in Johor had been restricted to two areas of agricultural development around Johor Bahru in the south and Muar in the north near Malacca. By 1911, these were joined by developed areas around inland Kluang, on the rail line, and coastal Batu Pahat, neighbouring Muar. In the decade after the rail line opened and both before and after British control in 1914, roads were built to feed the rail line and were pushed inland from coastal settlements to meet towns along the rail line, for example the road from Batu Pahat to Kluang. By 1920, rubber plantation-based development extended throughout much of southeastern Johor (Leinbach, 1975).

Do these events in the late 19th and early 20th centuries further modify our understanding of Singapore's islandness? While still literally an island on the eve of the fixed link, its 'extended' islandness had perhaps become even more debateable. Now, in addition to not being peripheral, the rapid development of the mainland meant that it was no longer so remote nor reliant on shipping. From 1909 the rail lines, only interrupted by a short ferry ride, provided more-or-less direct connections between Singapore and the rapidly developing western coastal region of Malaya. Goods (and passengers) transported by land were becoming an increasingly important part of Singapore's trading role. Johor Bahru was by this time a town of 15,000 or so with a similar mixture of people and cultures to Singapore's - although dwarfed by the latter's 1911 population of 303,000, of whom about 260,000 were in the urban municipality area, according to Yeoh (1996) cited by Trocki (2006: 64). Events were thus reducing the distinctiveness and bounded locality of the island's immigrant society and cultural mix. Singapore was also now even more emphatically a central place, not just with respect to a wider trading region but also to its immediate mainland hinterland. Furthermore, the social, political and economic changes

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brought about by these growing links had already been far more dramatic for the mainland nearby than for the island.

Another way to look at this is that the relationship between islandness and centrality changed during this period. As land-based resources in its immediate hinterland became more important, Singapore's islandness could have begun to become a liability had it been more remote from the mainland. Indeed, this is what happened to Zanzibar in the late 19th century, when it was eclipsed by the port at Mombassa (Hoyle, 1999). In this new era, retaining and enhancing Singapore's role as a centre of economic power required an intensification of transport connections with the mainland and the erosion of its islandness. Unlike Zanzibar and Gorée but like Hong Kong and Mombassa islands (Hoyle, 1999), proximity to the mainland made this transition relatively simple for Singapore. The causeway was the next major step in the process.

The Causeway Fixed Link and its Significance

How much and what kind of difference did the 1923 opening of the causeway make and where? Is there evidence of any bridge effects with the coming of the causeway? The discussion above suggests that the building of the causeway can be seen as just one key step in the concerted push for transport infrastructure development over the first several decades of the 20th Century.

The opening of the causeway coincided with the boom of road transport and was therefore an even bigger boost to road transport than it was to rail. Road development in Malaya had initially focused on feeding and complementing the rail line. Until 1910, all land transport of goods was by rail or bullock cart. However, the completion of parallel roads in Johor and a rapid rise in the number of motor vehicles, including lorries especially in the 1920s, increasingly made roads a competitor to rail (Kaur, 1985: 98). Thus, although rail had probably been the main focus for the causeway project, the

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opening of a direct road link between Singapore and Johor helped heighten road competition with the railways.

Although capital and labour exchanged in Singapore, together with the rail line and new roads, had already opened much of southeast Johor to agricultural development, the causeway is said to have further intensified trade between the Singapore metropole and its emerging agricultural hinterland and accelerated economic spill-over from Singapore's entrepot capitalist economy. The situation in Johor was described in 1926 as follows:

> "The opening of this Causeway has been a great boon, for it has permitted the running of through train service from Siam to Singapore without an exceedingly annoying and uneconomic trans-shipment, and has also given a great fillip to the motor industry, as planters from up-country can now deliver their goods direct to the merchant houses in Singapore by road" Kirby (1928: 251).

Direct statistical evidence of dramatic effects in Johor would be hard to muster however. The period immediately before and after the causeway opening was one of rapid change in Malaya generally. The effects of various changes were playing themselves out simultaneously, including the extension of British control to Johor in 1914, the surge in road development and the effects of the rail line completed in 1909. In addition, the key export industry (rubber) and global trade flows were both extremely volatile. Demand for rubber was high in first two decades of the 20th Century with the height of the rubber boom being 1910 to 1918 (Lim, 1978). However rubber suffered from periodic gluts through the 1920s and 30s (Trocki, 2006: 36-37) This must have somewhat dampened the discernable impact of the causeway itself on land development. The road network in Johor for example, continued to develop between 1920 and 1931 and between 1931 and 1939 but less dramatically than it had between 1911 and 1921 (Leinbach, 1975).

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It seems most likely that changes associated with the new fixed link involved a continuation and possibly some intensification of well-established trends. These affected both sides of the causeway but were asymmetrical. As in earlier periods, the primary direction of influence continued to be from the Singapore metropolis into the mainland, especially its towns and cities, rather than vice versa. As before, Johor saw more dramatic land use changes and any social and economic changes there would have represented a larger impact on a smaller population and more narrowly based economy. The direct impact of economic development on pre-existing mainland communities must have been profound, for example presumably for the many indigenous (*Orang Asli*) groups who must have been pushed away from ancestral areas.

However Singapore, more than its Johor hinterland, reaped the economic benefit of the rubber expansion, since the highly value-adding steps of selling and processing of rubber were concentrated in Singapore (Lim, 1978: 170). The hierarchy of Malayan ports was changed by the completion of the rail link and causeway, with the smaller ports in the peninsula being sidelined and the role of the three biggest being enhanced, especially Singapore's which handled by far the greatest tonnage and value (Lim, 1978). Singapore thus further enhanced its role as a key centre of economic, social and political influence and consolidated its place at the apex of the urban hierarchy in Malaya. This influence went beyond economic power and direct colonial control. As the biggest city, it also became a centre for social trends, political and religious ideas and cultural expression. This involved of course its Chinese majority and also the multicultural English speaking groups for whom a 'Malayan' identity gradually came to the fore. Furthermore, Singapore-based *Jawi Peranakan* (Muslims of mixed Indian and Malay heritage) journalists and writers played an important role in the emerging Malay nationalist and Islamic reformist movements (Trocki, 2006). Singapore also later became the centre of the Malay film industry with its golden age in the 1950s and 60s (Lockard, 1996). With Singapore playing such a central role in the development of Malayan identities, it seems

unlikely that its increasing connections with the mainland involved any sense of loss of 'island identity'.

Any changes akin to bridge effects thus seem to have been on the mainland, not the island side, with evidence of considerable change in mainland Johor, associated with the opening of the rail line as well as with the causeway. How can we explain a lack of bridge effects in Singapore? A lack of prior islandness is a possibility; but it was argued earlier that Singapore did possess considerable islandness in the 19th Century. Perhaps the causeway was not enough of a sudden change to result in bridge effects in Singapore? We have indeed seen that it was just one of several steps that might be seen to have eroded Singapore's islandness. However, the step-by-step nature of the process seems unlikely to explain the lack of bridge effects since they did have obvious impacts in Johor.

Political Separation, Economic Interdependence and the Second Fixed Link

Singapore maintained its role as Malaya's largest city and port through the first third of the 20th century. However, the nature and pertinence of islandness in Singapore-Johor interactions has seen further surprising changes in the four decades since the political separation of Singapore and Malaysia in 1965. These changes have been complicated by contrasting approaches to ethnic politics and national identity, developing nationalisms, the assertion of national interests, ever-changing economic relationships with emerging rivalries, and efforts to cooperate over further expansion of fixed transport links.

In 1957, Singapore, with its large ethnic Chinese majority, was left out of independent Malaya, remaining for six more years a crown colony although it had limited self-government from 1955. Contrasting approaches to the politics of ethnicity, as much as ethnicity itself, were central to the turbulent two years of merger and Singapore's expulsion from the federation of Malaysia in 1965. The assertion of political dominance

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and 'special privileges' by *bumiputra* ('indigenous') communities, primarily Malays, who were in a slight majority in the federation, clashed with the People's Action Party government in Singapore which pushed for a 'Malaysian Malaysia' and 'meritocracy'. Since that time, political elites in both countries have often seen the other's approach to the political economy of ethnicity as an affront (Ganesan, 1998).

In the early post-independence decades, fear-related themes were prominent in Singaporean expressions of identity and some might be seen as resonating with vulnerability-related elements of islandness ideas. These include several that were not seen in the earlier periods discussed above, including political discourses of 'survivalism', vulnerability, a tightly constrained sense of boundedness, smallness, and of being a 'red' or 'Chinese' or 'multicultural' dot amidst a 'green' or mainly Muslim region (Rahim, 1999; Ganesan, 2005; Chua, 1995). Socially and culturally, the post-independence era also erected significant national barriers to cultural exchange and severely curtailed Singapore's role as cultural centre for its immediate region. It is thus difficult to disentangle islandness issues from the effects of political separation, nationalism and territoriality in understanding relations across the straits. This can also be seen in several of the most prominent bilateral disputes, such as over the terms under which Singapore purchases Johor water, over Singapore's land reclamation efforts and over the Malaysian proposal to replace the causeway with a bridge.

However, initial fears that independent Singapore's economy would suffer by being cut off from its hinterland and that Singapore would find itself in a weak bargaining position over its dependence on the mainland (for water and food imports for example) proved largely unfounded. Despite occasional posturing, Malaysia honoured all colonial agreements, including the crucial ones over water supply. Tariff barriers were not new, having existed also during the colonial and merger periods, and Singapore's role in transhipment for Malaysia declined only gradually and in relative terms as industrialization in Singapore took off (Kumar, 1994). Malaysians working in the newly

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industrializing Singapore, with many commuting from Johor Bahru, became significant in the 1970s (Lim and Byrnes, 1985). Singapore's duty-free environment continued to encourage high levels of leisure and shopping visits from Malaysia until the late 1980s (Lim, 1990).

Despite Singapore's prominent official narratives of vulnerability and the frequently troubled bilateral relations, economic interactions actually intensified dramatically in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Rising costs and wages in Singapore, a rise in Singaporean purchasing power and Malaysia's enhanced receptiveness to foreign direct investment dovetailed with Singapore's efforts to move up the value chain and its first steps to 'internationalize' its economy (Perry, 1991). Related changes included accelerated relocation of Singapore-based manufacturing into Johor, further growth in skilled labour migration and daily labour flows from Johor to Singapore, the rise of southern Johor as a retail and leisure destination for Singaporeans and its emergence as Malaysia's third major focus for manufacturing investment (Lim, 1990; Kumar, 1994; Lim and Byrnes, 1985).

In this context, 1989 saw the first official talk of a growth triangle as a Singapore suggestion under the name SIJORI (Singapore-Johor-Riau) (Sparke et al, 2004). The Indonesia-Malaysia-Singapore Growth Triangle (IMS-GT) was formalised in 1994 at the height of official enthusiasm for greater economic integration across the straits. It was also in this context that the Second Link bridge was proposed and built as a second fixed link to run between the western end of Singapore and rural southwest Johor to complement the causeway in Singapore's north. Approved in principle in 1990, detailed agreement to proceed came in 1994 and it was completed in early 1997. With a vehicle capacity at 200,000 vehicles per day, which is said to be four times that of the causeway, it was the most dramatic expansion of the physical connections for many decades. Much of the early rhetoric associated with its planning and building portrayed it as a symbol of cooperation, close bilateral ties and as a window to developmental opportunities,

especially for the rural part of Johor that it served (see for example, Business Times Singapore, 18 July 1989). This enthusiasm outweighed the early uneasy bilateral relations, initial Malaysian scepticism of the SIJORI growth triangle notion (Yuhanis et al., 1991), concerns over which side's port would benefit more, and over negative impacts for Johor villagers and their resistance to land acquisition (Straits Times, 3 May 1990).

Unfortunately, cooperation stumbled at the final hurdle as toll charges were being finalised for the Second Link (Barter, 2006 forthcoming). As a result, tolls and charges remain rather higher than optimal and much higher than the causeway's, creating a significant deterrent to traffic. This was compounded by slower than expected economic growth and the delayed development of an associated major urban development on the Johor side, Bandar Nusajaya. The Second Link thus appears yet to fulfil much of its promise. Any bridge effects here are again on the Johor side, although they have so far been less dramatic than anticipated.

The Second Link's problems probably underline ambivalence towards cooperation by these two countries more than resistance to physical connections as such. Although the IMS-GT has sometimes been held up as a supposed exemplar of cross-border integration (for example, see Kumar, 1994; Lee, 1991) others have emphasised a range of complex bordering processes (see Sparke et al, 2004) and a reluctance to go beyond ad hoc cooperation (Grundy-Warr et al.,1999). Nevertheless, it should be noted that total transport capacity across the straits did increase greatly between the late 1980s and the late 1990s despite the transport links often becoming entangled in the complexities of a prickly bilateral relationship. This expanded capacity was through the Second Link project and through a series of less spectacular efforts, especially by increasing the capacity of the checkpoints and their approaches and streamlining a number of border procedures (Barter, 2006 forthcoming).

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Singapore, Islandness and Fixed Links since 1997

The financial crisis of the late 1990s marked another turning point in Singapore Johor interactions. It led to dampened investment flows and reduced optimism. The years since then have also seen an intensification of economic rivalry. Conversely, the crisis probably further increased cross-border shopping in Johor due to a further rapid shift in the Malaysian Ringgit (RM) to Singapore Dollar (S$) exchange rate, from about 1.8 to 2.3 or so. Indeed, flows across this border are substantial. The largest movements are of Malaysians commuting to work and education in Singapore (roughly 30,000 to 50,000 people) and of shopping and leisure trips from Singapore to Johor (30,000 typically but up to 60,000 or more on certain days) (Mafoot, 2003a and 2003b). Likely demographic scenarios suggest that the crossings can only get busier. Singapore has over 4 million residents, while Johor Bahru District, which roughly coincides with the Johor Bahru Metropolitan Area, had almost 1 million by the year 2000 (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2001). A 2030 population for Singapore significantly higher than the earlier planning horizon 'target' of 5.5 million has recently been mooted, while continued growth of 4 to 5% per annum in southern Johor would produce a metropolis of around 2.5 million people by 2020.

While both sides are clearly aware of their highly interconnected economies and neither wishes to disrupt business as usual, reaching agreement on any enhancement of cross-straits connections now seems more difficult than it was in the early 1990s. An illustration is the recent 'half-bridge' saga that arose from a 1996 Malaysian proposal that the causeway be replaced by a bridge. In early 2003 after negotiations on the proposal (and several other issues) had bogged down, the then Malaysian Prime Minister, Dr Mahathir, dramatically announced that Malaysia would replace just its side of the causeway with a 'half' bridge. This became a long-running controversy, with Singapore subsequently seeking other concessions in return for agreement. The proposed 'half-bridge' threatened to become a highly visible expression of the prickly nature of the bilateral relationship (Barter, 2006 forthcoming). However, in April 2006 the Malaysian

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cabinet under Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi announced the cancellation of the project saying that legal advice had concluded that unilateral action on the Malaysian side would indeed breach international law and that Singapore's price (in terms of concessions) for agreement to a full bridge was too high.

While Singapore's interactions with Johor continue to increase in absolute terms they are overshadowed by the international aspirations of both. Singapore's efforts to internationalize its economy continue but the late 1990s financial crisis also prompted it to increasingly look beyond the immediate region (Asiaweek, 2000). Malaysia, instead of fretting about Johor being locked into a subordinate role in the cross-border region as in the 1980s and 90s, now competes with Singapore in a number of arenas, especially ports, high value-added foreign direct investments and air traffic (Debrah et al., 2000; Ganesan, 2005). Meanwhile, Singapore's longstanding dependence on Johor for much of its water supply is also changing. In the last decade Singapore enhanced its efforts to diversify its water sources and in 2003 was able to announce that it will no longer need to extend its water agreements with Malaysia when they expire in 2011 and 2061 (Singapore Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources, 2003).

These trends cast Singapore's islandness in a new light. Prominent recent economic storylines in Singapore's sense of itself include again smallness, of having no resources except human ones and human-made capital, of needing to face the storms and 'tectonic shifts' of international competitive forces and flows, the need to be willing to internationalize its economy and of being inevitably a price taker, subject to, rather than creating, the key trends which affect it (Kelly, 2001; Ganesan, 2005; Yeoh and Chang, 2001; Coe and Kelly, 2002). Peripherality has continued to be absent, except perhaps as a fear, in the event of economic failure or marginalization relative to its rivals, including Johor. Recent trends and strategies might be seen as bringing Singapore full circle. Its aspirations to global city status and to strengthen its role as international hub in the financial, petrochemical, air and shipping industries are somewhat reminiscent of the

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early 18th Century situation when local connections were much less important than the international ones. However, the local context has changed profoundly, with mainland Johor no longer a peripheral backwater but an aspiring rival centre of economic activity.

Discussion and conclusion

This chapter has interrogated Singapore's islandness as well as extended notions of islandness, and their compatibility with an island that is both literally an island and a central place. Evidence for bridge effects was considered, not only on the island but also on the mainland. These themes were explored in order to shed light on precisely how this case is anomalous and what this might imply for conceptual themes addressed by this book.

The historical narrative revealed a number of themes. In the early 19th Century and earlier there was little contradiction between islandness and being a central place or trading hub. This suggests it would be problematic to require peripherality to be a key aspect of the notion of islandness. Singapore's islandness was later somewhat eroded, step-by-step in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Economic connections with the nearby mainland became more important and land transport investments, especially the rail line then the causeway, were crucial parts of the process. It might therefore be thought that the lack of bridge effects can be explained by saying that Singapore's islandness had already been eroded by the time of the causeway. However, this is undermined by noting the absence of bridge effects at any of the steps along the way, such as the opening of the railway for example. Rather, it was the mainland that saw the most change at each step.

In the decades following the 1965 political separation from Malaysia, it initially seemed that Singapore's islandness might again become prominent. But initial fears that independent Singapore's economy would be cut off from its hinterland were exaggerated, except perhaps in the cultural sphere. Indeed, Johor emerged with a key role in

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Singapore's industrial spill-over and economic restructuring in the 1980s and early 1990s. Accordingly, physical connections and flows between the island and mainland intensified and diversified and the second fixed transport link was planned and built. The obvious impacts of enhanced transport links continued to focus on the mainland while continuing to serve Singapore in less visible ways. Finally, although recent years have seen economic interactions between Singapore and southern Johor remain very important, these have nevertheless been overshadowed to a great extent as both sides increasingly compete to expand their wider international roles. Recent negotiations over fixed links have thus been complex and troubled (Barter, 2006 forthcoming). It is increasingly difficult to characterise interactions between the two sides in terms of centre and periphery.

We have seen that this case highlights a tension over whether or not peripherality is intrinsic to the idea of islandness. It affirms that islandness can be compatible with centrality without becoming meaningless. Therefore the 'anomalous' lack of bridge effects on the island cannot be explained away by denying Singapore's islandness. A lack of peripherality rather than of islandness seems more likely to explain the absence of bridge effects on Singapore as it became more connected with its mainland. This case implies that the search for conditions for bridge effects must focus not on the multi-dimensional notion of islandness but on more specific characteristics, such as peripherality.

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