

Conclusion

In the long course of writing this book, “Global Asia” has begun circulating more strongly as a term. As with the Singaporean state’s branding of the nation, “Global Asia” in the corporate world—Global Asia Alliance Consultants, Global Asia Trading Company, Thrive Global Asia Pacific, Global Asia Exporters, Global Asia Holdings, and Global Asia Material Companies, to name but a few examples—signals cosmopolitanism and readiness to manage the demands of global capitalism. The corporate brand of Global Asia means that the very term “Global Asia” accrues meaning and value through circuits of finance. More familiarly for readers of this book and as briefly mentioned in the introduction, “Global Asia” and “Global Asias” name academic subfields. As the fields of Global Asia and Global Asias becomes more prevalent, we also see the development of new university programs and research centers, which in turn, confer and accrue intellectual value. Although corporate and academic manifestations of Global Asia are often politically at odds, all renditions materialize as institutional formations. Institutions generate, organize, and systemize value. This is not to suggest that institutions are always suspect or problematic, but as Stuart Hall once warned, institutionalization is “a moment of extraordinarily profound danger.”¹ This leads me to ponder, what is that danger with respect to Global Asia?

Thinking about the politics of institutionalization with respect to Global Asia brings me to the case of the soon-to-be-closed Yale-NUS College, a collaboration between Yale University and National University of Singapore. YNC’s conception as a liberal arts college began as a part of “higher education trends driven by Asian entry into the so-called global knowledge economy, manifesting in high government investment in research and higher education.”² With its highly touted Common Curriculum in which students engage “Asian as well as Western materials,”³ and the assertion YNC was an educational institution that would be able “to feel the buzz of societies on the move, to respond to the zeitgeist, the issues, the priorities of a rising continent”⁴ and was *not* simply “a carbon copy of Yale in New Haven,”⁵ Yale-NUS College was part and parcel of what I have outlined

in this book as Global Asia. It is an institution both producing and constitutive of Singapore's soft power and cultural capital.

With no warning or prior discussion, the National University of Singapore President, Tan Eng Chye, President of Yale-NUS College, Tan Tai Yong, and founding president of Yale-NUS, Pericles Lewis, announced on August 27, 2021 that the Class of 2025 would be YNC's final class.⁶ The details on the reasons behind the closure are murky, but various think pieces and investigative journalistic articles speculate that the purported problems of financial stability or of capital fundraising do not tell the entire story; rather, it is YNC's controversial policy of academic freedom—a policy not extended to NUS itself—that is under fire because it goes against the state's history of controlling free speech.⁷ Whatever the true rationale behind YNC's impending closure and however justified, when considering that the "[Singapore] education ministry provided capital funding for Yale-NUS's infrastructure and matched donations to its endowment fund,"⁸ the liberal arts college is ultimately a state institution. This is to say, regardless of the exceptions to free speech that YNC was able to take through its association with Yale, YNC is ultimately subject to state power. Certainly, the sudden nature of the closure and the lack of clarity around the reasons why it was closed are characteristic of authoritarian governance.

From the view of authority, the problem with institutions of soft power is that they do not always operate according to plan. Cultivating creativity, even in the name of producing neoliberal entrepreneurs for the global economy, can be risky for a state attempting to curate certain economic or political outcomes. Reflecting on his experience, Shawn Hoo, a Yale-NUS alum, writes:

For all of us who were, unbeknownst to us, experimental subjects—alumni, students, faculty, staff—Yale-NUS was a place where, we were led to believe, we could truly build a community of learners who studied a curriculum we actively wanted to shape; for all of the well-considered criticism of our cloistered elitism, a real place where we wanted to find out how academic inquiry could meet social engagement; a physical home where residential living can be innovated on with policies such as gender-neutral living (a first on Singapore campuses); a true opportunity to find our place in the higher education landscape in Singapore, in Asia, for the World—or so our vision used to go.⁹

On the one hand, one can detect a tone of resignation in Hoo's language, one that understands how he, as a Singaporean, is subject to the vagaries of disciplinary power. Yet Hoo also emphasizes the joy that he and his classmates found in living and working together as creative, intellectual, national subjects. I have heard similar anecdotes from faculty about the pedagogical pleasures they have working at the college when forming a liberal arts curriculum in Singapore. Like many of the writers under study throughout this book, Hoo's account emphasizes pleasure. It also demonstrates how, in practice, YNC students, staff, and faculty exceeded the ideological confines set out by a state institution of Global Asia. Hoo's remarks and

the literary and political contestations of Singapore as Global Asia under study throughout this book teach us that although Singaporeans, as potential agents of Global Asia, are subject to the whims of institutional power that may promote and dispense them as necessary, it is by underscoring the memory of pleasure, no matter how fleeting, that the possibilities of new, political futures are forged. In this way, we might regard pleasure as a counter-authoritarian form, one that allows for freedom from state instrumentalization.

The case of YNC is instructive for how it stages a conflict between harder and softer forms of power. Indeed, this book challenges the Eurocentric modes of reading that follow narrow conceptions of power in diagnosing Singapore as solely disciplinary, forceful, or coercive. However, future directions to consider, as illustrated by the YNC example, are the contexts, continuities, and contradictions among manifold forms of power, in Singapore and beyond. One of the priorities of *Becoming Global Asia* has been to foreground the question of soft power in the context of Singapore. This should not be mistaken as a dismissal of the real oppression and marginalization of those who do not easily fit within the exuberant story of Singapore as Global Asia: the non-Chinese, the non-anglophone, the migrant workers, the queer, the elderly, the disabled, the working classes.¹⁰ On the contrary, it is precisely by bringing soft power to the forefront and situating authoritarian, disciplinary power through what I have described as a “feeling of structure,” that I have produced a nuanced account of power in Singapore. By examining Singapore’s soft power we are more able to understand and to challenge the systemic array of cultural, political, and socioeconomic forces that the modern state marshals to its various ends. State power over the nation is global.

To illustrate this point, *Becoming Global Asia* has offered a critical account of Singapore’s emergence as a capitalist haven with an outsized influence on the global cultural imaginary in the historical context of postcolonial capitalism. Genre has been methodologically central to this book. The emergence of major and popular anthologies, demographic compilations, coming-of-career narratives, and the princess fantasy at particular historical moments of economic change—state developmentalism, Asian Values, and Global Asia—reveal the cultural capitalist logics of their moments. My close readings of the texts and genres of Global Asia further elucidate how such cultural logics are not only responding to global economic imperatives by, for example, cultivating a cosmopolitan, diasporic citizenry, but also negotiating historical layers of postcolonial governance and evolving economic conditions within Singapore and beyond. The emergence of careers as a pleasurable mode of work, as I discuss in chapter 3 for instance, is as much a manifestation of neoliberal corporate ideologies of individualism as it is a rejection of the developmental postcolonial state. Insofar that “genre” refers to literary typology and to a mode for creating expectations for how literary objects should be read, it has also been significant for thinking about Singapore as a problem of interpretation.

As a project of soft power, Singapore as Global Asia has involved changing the city-state's image and narrative while also shaping the terms for how it is read. Whether through major anthologies that draw on colonial organizing logics to make claims to modernity or through demographic compilations to prove Singapore's global influence through its cosmopolitan populations, one way that postcolonial capitalism operates is through an appeal to anglophone legibility in the global cultural imaginary. Singapore's legibility—and thus desirability—rests on what Jini Kim Watson describes as the “loose signifier of ‘Asia.’”¹¹ Its looseness does not suggest that Asia has no meaning, but rather that Singapore can make claim to Asia and take advantage of Western desire for Asia, as we saw with the Hollywood adaptation of *Crazy Rich Asians*. As my discussion of coming-of-career narratives and the princess fantasy show, however, that legibility cannot only be attributed to the state even if the project of legibility begins there. Limiting understandings of Singapore to expressions of state power, as I have argued, does not capture how Global Asia is accorded a transnational coherence. Certainly, new questions will emerge about Singapore's anglophonic legibility with the rise of China. How will Global Asia morph with considerations of Singapore's sinophonic legibility?

By articulating postcolonial capitalism as a mode of recognizing the shorter though heterogeneous period of what historically constitutes “the postcolonial,” this project has also aimed to take up the question of how the field of postcolonial studies should engage with the contemporary capitalist moment. Because the field of postcolonial literature has recently been transformed into global anglophone literature, my preservation of “postcolonial” might appear nostalgic.¹² But in expanding our critical view to sites that are not typically marked as postcolonial—or, shall we say, not legible in postcolonialism's canon—my book has aimed to push at the field's discursive limits and at how it typically uncovers and analyzes the working of power. While the field of postcolonial studies has been concerned with contesting the ongoing legacies of imperialism, and rightly so, this book has been more interested in thinking through the ongoing legacies of postcolonial nationalism in our political present.

Engaging questions of what that legacy looks like in our contemporary moment has meant grappling with the dynamics of US empire and thus the transpacific, which until the recent rise of China, have arguably been the most significant economically structuring forces of the global order. While, generally speaking, transpacific studies has been offered as a mode of rehabilitating parochial tendencies in Asian American and Asian studies produced by disciplinary silos and nationalist methodologies, *Becoming Global Asia* demonstrates how transpacific studies can produce new research directions for postcolonial studies to consider. Given the Cold War, it is almost impossible to disregard the transpacific in the Southeast Asian context. But if the transpacific continues to be a contested, interimperialized space with global effects, postcolonialists would do well to consider how the transpacific might change how we theorize “the postcolonial.” In this way,

I join Jini Kim Watson and Gary Wilder's call to be "Neither simply *for* nor *against* postcolonialism, and instead to "think *with* and *beyond* postcolonial theory about political contemporaneity."¹³ As *Becoming Global Asia* has shown in the Singaporean context, the postcolonial is becoming increasingly appropriated and exploited for capital gain. Consequently, we must revise, expand, and multiply our notions of what postcoloniality looks like.