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The relational co-production of "success" and "failure," or the politics of anxiety of exporting urban "models" elsewhere

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ABSTRACT

This paper critically examines the case of the much-vaunted Singapore "model" and its export via the Sino-Singapore Tianjin Eco-city (SSTEC), a megaproject jointly developed by the Singaporean and Chinese states in northeastern China. It revolves around the central question of why, for some Singaporean officials, this export was thought to have "failed" in spite of the model's acclaimed success globally. To address this, the paper historicizes the Singapore model, tracing undercurrents of (geo)political existentialism through Singaporean state meta-narratives that are enacted through thehistorical politics of anxiety and the practitioner politics of anxiety. It argues that categories of policy "success" and "failure" are relationally co-produced through a politics of anxiety, wherein their stakes are amplified in ways distinctive to small postcolonial city-states. Collectively, the paper emphasizes the enduring significance of (inter)state actors and structures for transnational urban policy mobilization and the limits to assumptions of post-failure policy learning.

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Introduction: the anxieties of small states

In 2015, the postcolonial city-state of Singapore celebrated its 50th year of independence. Amidst the celebratory atmosphere of national commemoration, this anniversary was approached as a routine opportunity for reflection on the city-state's place in the world. The speech given by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong during the National Day Rally was no exception:

> We celebrated how we had turned vulnerability into strength … our journey from third world to first … [but] big things are happening around us and unless we keep track of events and stay on top of developments, we may be overwhelmed. Singapore is at a turning point. We have just completed 50 successful years. Now we are starting our next 50 years of nationhood. What will this future be? Will Singapore become an ordinary country, with intractable problems, slow or even negative growth; heavy burdens for our children; gridlocked government; unable to act?
>
> – Government of Singapore (2015)

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State meta-narratives of "vulnerability" reveal a longstanding, almost existential fear of failing to participate in globalization, spurred by a more generalized anxiety regarding Singapore's prolonged political sovereignty in the world as a small island-city-state. Small states are constantly subject to political, economic, and military threats (Singh, 1988): in Singapore's case, this has cultivated a "deep security complex" (Dent, 2001) that has historically oriented the scaling of its policy interests toward the external – Southeast Asia, Pacific Asia, the world – to strategically cope with perceived, scripted deficiencies. This positional precarity is couched in an "ideology of survival" (Chan, 1971, p. 154) to remind the populace never to take security and (economic) success for granted, lest failure catch up with the Singapore story. The paper discusses this burden of success, expressed through a preemptive stance against (the prospect of) failure, which extends to the extraterritorial ventures of the Singaporean state in the realm of transnational urban policy mobilization.

Over the last three decades, a diplomatic strategy cultivated by the Singaporean state to negotiate this state of vulnerability has involved the export of its (urban) developmental expertise to countries in the Global South under the rubric of the Singapore "model." The Singapore model is a policy emblem of urban expertise, a post-colony's scripted story of "success," stripped of aberration and abjection, where failure is acknowledged only insofar as it can be narrated as an obstacle that has been vanquished. With China having emerged as a "big power", with game-changing consequences for geopolitical relations globally and within Pacific Asia, the Singaporean state has negotiated this since the 1990s by systematically courting the Chinese as a policy audience. This has been undertaken by exporting the Singapore model to China through customized, intergovernmental channels, resulting in the joint development of new-build cities that are viewed as symbolic of wider diplomatic goals. Lauded by both countries as "flagship cooperation projects between the governments of Singapore and China," there have so far been two developed megaprojects: the Sino-Singapore Suzhou Industrial Park (SSSIP) and the Sino-Singapore Tianjin Eco-city (SSTEC). The SSTEC, in particular, has been extolled by both governments as "a model for sustainable development" (SSTEC, 2019), and viewed in China as a "green urban solution" (Pow & Neo, 2015), the "current 'best practice' model" for its "green leap forward" (Chang et al., 2016). Such are the representations of the SSTEC as one version of "success." If the travels of the Singapore model are intended to exhibit "successful" exports of Singaporean policy expertise to foreign settings, they would appear to have come to fruition in such intergovernmental projects. The significant state investment in the form of sending top-level technocrats overseas, especially on the part of the Singaporean state with its comparatively smaller civil service, makes these projects "exception[s] to the urban norm … [that] serve as indicator[s] for future urban development" (Caprotti, 2015, p. 36). Herein lies the burden of success for overwrought Singaporean state officials, several of whom viewed the "failure" of the SSTEC as symbolic of the changing power relations between Singapore and China. Such are the travails of the architects of the Singapore model, born of the struggle to reconcile a confidence to make claims of capitalizing on the future, and a fear that reality will not live up to these aspirations, on the other.

This is a paper about transnational urban policy mobilization which revolves around that dialectical tension between assertiveness and apprehension, between the confidence of success and the fear of failure. This is integral to the intrinsic logic of the Singapore model, rooted in the politico-historical context of Singapore's "positionality" (Sheppard, 2002) as a small island-city-state in Southeast Asia. The existing work on urban models

has done much to excavate the performative production of success and "best practice." However, as several have argued, success remains but one half of the equation in terms of understanding how differing policy outcomes are enmeshed in broader regulatory landscapes of power (Clarke, 2012; Jacobs, 2012). Within critical human geography the existing literature on policy mobilization and, specifically, how policy failure is governed, has come to the broad consensus that (the seeming dualism of) success and failure are relationally connected, not least because neither conception "make[s] sense without the other" (McCann and Ward, 2015, p. 828; Temenos & McCann, 2013). Such a relational geography is alert to contingency, contradiction, and unevenness in the processual co-production of policy outcomes across space and scale. The paper contributes to this literature by showing how exactly success and failure are relationally co-produced through a case of South-South policy mobilization between a small state and a big state. Historicizing the Singapore model and its export to China through the SSTEC, the paper argues that success and failure are relationally, inescapably co-produced through a "politics of anxiety."

"Anxiety" is commonly deployed in domains of health and risk, denoting a more generalized state of societal becoming. Wilkinson (2001, p. 17) frames the "condition of anxiety" as "a function of the social predicaments and cultural contradictions in which individuals are made to live out their everyday lives." Critical geographers have conceptualized anxiety as a disruptive social practice in the context of food insecurity and consumption (Jackson et al., 2012), apart from general uses of the term that reference emotional states of insecurity, marginality, and ambivalence. This paper takes inspiration from a more sustained approach to anxiety that critically examines state-led developmental policymaking models, agendas, and practices, together with the anxiety and abjection experienced by state officials (Doucette, 2020; Sioh, 2010). Doucette (2020), in particular, thinks of anxiety vis-à-vis Anna Tsing's concept of "friction" to foreground the complexity of globalizing connections, viewing anxiety as part of the "mixed emotions that accompany, but are often abstracted away from, the discussion of economic models." These social relations, entangled through developmental models, show how "new connections and flows … also create anxious and awkward entanglements" (Doucette, 2020, p. 3). This paper uses the term "politics of anxiety" to denote the spiraling tension between success and failure as interlocking, mutually reinforcing processes, and the driving force behind the use of the Singapore model as a diplomatic tool of knowledge-sharing. It elaborates on two interrelated realms of this process – the historical politics of anxiety and the practitioner politics of anxiety – that are (geo) politically grounded in Singapore's positionality as a small postcolonial city-state, dominated by ethnic Chinese, within the "Malay world" of Southeast Asia.

The empirics are derived from fieldwork undertaken in Singapore and Tianjin from 2013–2015. The paper draws primarily on 15 semi-structured interviews (from a total of 32) with Singaporean state officials who were involved in the SSTEC. I first noticed the heightened awareness of "failure" and "success" during my encounters with Singaporean state officials, many of whom were initially suspicious of the motivations of my research. One defensive official retorted, in response to what I had assumed was a relatively innocuous question regarding the SSTEC's role in industry creation: "Are you just going to say that it's failed, is that the point? You want to see how successful it is and what the problems are?" Much of this secrecy can be traced back to the bilateral aspects of

the SSTEC as a Sino-Singaporean project: in state parlance, the SSTEC is a "government-to-government," or "G-G," project whose territorial development is anxiously monitored as demonstrative of the health of Sino-Singaporean relations. The SSTEC is the second G-G project undertaken between Singapore and China; its predecessor, the SSSIP, was considered to have been an embarrassing failure for the Singaporean state. Because of this political primacy and legacy, the SSTEC is (still) regarded as a politically-sensitive topic, especially considering the wider lack of transparency surrounding the extraterritorial ventures of the Singaporean state.

The general impression of researching public officials in Singaporean and Chinese governments is that interviews add little real insight because individuals are hesitant to disclose information that is not already publicly available. While this is not entirely inaccurate, there are ways of circumventing these state-sanctioned silences. Initially, I was told that the "standing policy" of the SSTEC was to decline all interview requests, but once I found a foothold in the "right" networks, snowballing serendipitously propelled me toward the key actors of the project on the Singaporean side, many of whom were prominent members of senior management who had assumed leading roles in the SSTEC because of their background in the Singaporean civil service. I also targeted Singaporean officials who had left the SSTEC, or retired from the civil service altogether, who were more forthcoming. 10 of the 15 Singaporean officials who had participated in the SSTEC (founded in 2008) had also been involved in the SSSIP (founded in 1994), establishing a continuity between both projects that regularly surfaced during interviews. Access to Chinese officials was harder to secure. Hence the paper presents a strong Singaporean positionality that has value in illuminating why the SSTEC was considered to have "failed" for some Singaporean state officials, contextualized within broader historical (geo)political predicaments faced by this small city-state, contrary to public Chinese and international perceptions of undiluted success.

The paper proceeds in four parts. First, it reviews critical geographical scholarship on how policy failure is governed, discussing the difficulty of defining "failure." It complements this with insights from political geographic work on how nation-state actors have enacted state-led agendas through (transnational) urban policy mobilization, foregrounding the transnational dimensions of the Singapore model and the SSTEC. Second, it attends to the historical politics of anxiety via Singapore's post-independence origins and its positionality as a small Chinese-dominated country in the "Malay world" of Southeast Asia, showing how the Singapore model became deployed by the Singaporean state as a tool of diplomacy with the Chinese state to negotiate regional power dynamics. Third, it follows the Singapore model to the symbolic terrain of the SSTEC, exploring the practitioner politics of anxiety from the perspective of Singaporean state officials which manifested in the form of intergovernmental tensions that were interpreted, crucially, as symbolic of changing power dynamics in Sino-Singaporean bilateral relations. The fourth section concludes the paper.

Governing policy failure

Presently there is a small but growing body of work in critical geographical scholarship that addresses failure, most frequently vis-à-vis policy and globalization research. While no standard definition of "failure" among critical geographers currently exists, most

would agree that failure occurs when the objectives of key stakeholders are not met. Relatedly, failure is understood to emerge when policies, programs, or projects do not materialize as planned (e.g., Chang, 2017). A more expansive reading views these occurrences as symptomatic of deeper regulatory shifts in policy regimes (e.g., Brenner et al., 2010; Wells, 2014); a generalized disruption of (globalizing) flows (e.g., Perrons & Posocco, 2009); or, quite simply, the unwanted "other" of success. Generally, the literature lacks a systematic definition of what exactly "policy failure" is and how such instances of failure can be recognized across different geographical contexts. In particular, there is a troubling slippage, materially and discursively, between the variegated forms of failure that manifest during policymaking. Does "policy failure" mean the same thing as when a policy does not "proceed as expected" (Lovell, 2019, p. 314), compared to when an entire infrastructural project, typically composed of a range of policies and programs, "fail[s] to materialize" (Chang, 2017, p. 1725)? Such types of policy-related failures are qualitatively distinctive in terms of form, process, and scale. Explaining their coexistence and contradictions requires greater precision in our conceptualizations. By examining instances of "failure" from the perspectives of Singaporean state officials, this paper highlights its historicized, socially constructed nature, suggesting that one way forward is to pay attention to how practitioners define, negotiate, and contest "failure."

In that absolute failure remains more mythical than actual, megaprojects rarely fail *entirely* because the variety of policies and ideational components involved are usually mobilized elsewhere, eventually, in spite of their authors' intentions. Lauermann (2016) examines failed Olympic bids in the US, arguing that despite the failure of its bid, Boston continued to operate as an institutional intermediary for re-enrolling American policymakers into wider Olympic networks. Chang (2017) shows that the failure of the Dongtan Eco-city to physically materialize hardly impeded subsequent teams from extracting lessons for eco-city-building through study trips, though it was likely for such reasons that Dongtan became pathologized as an "anti-model," a cautionary tale best circumvented than a success story worth simulating (Kennedy, 2016). This ambiguity of pinpointing the exact limits of failure suggests that failure and success are not cleanly separated. Embracing these entanglements, scholars have conceptualized alternative vocabularies, emphasizing process over outcome. Wells (2014, p. 475) conceptualizes "policyfailing" to locate the repeated "moments in which policies are defeated, stopped, or stalled … the making of a policy may fail temporarily, repeatedly, or permanently. What demands attention [are] … the actual practices and conditional forces that create these moments of policyfailing." To "attend to practices that fall between (and beyond) success and failure," Colven (2020) illustrates these interconnections through Jakarta's Great Garuda Seawall. Similarly, this paper conceives of "anxiety" as the framework through which ideals and instances of "success" and "failure" are relationally co-constituted and co-produced.

It is not unusual, however, to find that even if categories of success and failure are entangled in both practice and theory, these categories continue to remain distinct and politicized by officials, surfacing tensions between both perspectives. State leaders are famously reluctant to acknowledge failure, either publicly or privately, as this would require a radical rethinking of core governance values (May, 1992). To reaffirm dominant ideologies and to preserve organizational coherence, states are more inclined to "airbrush out" policy or political failures (Jones & Ward, 2002, p. 487). This heightened awareness

of, and aversion to, failure assumes greater significance in cases where large-scale infrastructure becomes a "spectacular" nation-building project, physically and politically prominent, heavily symbolic of state agendas and aspirations of the future that are constitutive of the "ongoing art of being global" (Ong, 2011, p. 3), especially significant in postcolonial cities of the Global South where state-corporate alliances rework land and capital in transformative ways (Shatkin, 2019). Large megaprojects can also "introduc[e] new geopolitical dynamic[s] among countries in the region," as Moser (2018, p. 936) shows in the case of Forest City, Malaysia, where Chinese investment reworked existing regional hierarchies.

To unpack the Singaporean state's (geo)political agendas in exporting the Singapore model abroad, as well as the heightened political stakes of the SSTEC, this paper draws on research that brings a more political geographic lens to transnational urban policy mobilization, critically examining state agendas and the agency of state actors to scale up their ambitions to "shap[e] such spatial transformations to state interests" (Shatkin, 2019, p. 69). On the use of "geopolitical" as a spatial scale of analysis, I follow Sioh (2010) in acknowledging that "relationally, geopolitical intervention and negotiation take place at different levels, not just between citizens and the state but between states." This paper focuses on interstate relationships, in this case Sino-Singaporean bilateral relations from the perspectives of Singaporean officials, which are grounded in "a postcolonial government's anxiety about its legitimacy" (Sioh, 2010, p. 469). Extant work that explores the role and implications of nation-state actors in driving and shaping transnational urban policy mobilization, specifically "world-aspiring projects" (Ong, 2011, p. 4), has largely been undertaken in historical-geographical settings beyond the Global North. Bunnell (2003) analyzes how Malaysian state officials sought to advance non-Western visions of modernity through the Multimedia Super Corridor. Koch (2013) foregrounds cities as privileged sites of nation-building that "synecdochically represent the country as a whole," examining situated Kazakhstani geopolitical imaginations amongst state officials and citizens, concluding that discussions of contemporary urbanization must consider "broader (geo)political context[s] in which the discourse – encompassing material and rhetorical intervention – unfolds." Other relevant political geographic work that foregrounds nation-state actors includes the emergent research on "urban developmentalism" (Doucette & Park, 2018), which situates East Asian urbanization within wider geopolitical-economic contexts. They investigate how the ambitions of (geo)political alliances govern urban space through "spaces of exception" and "transnational networks of expertise." Collectively, these strands of work emphasize the agency of nation-state officials in transnational urban development, reinforcing the enduring significance of (geo)political relations and national politico-economic contexts.

This provides a starting point for understanding how the Singapore model is mobilized transnationally through a politics of anxiety. Through the eyes of Singaporean state officials, it illustrates the amplified political stakes that are attached to instances and outcomes of "success" and "failure." These are mutually reinforcing, driving each other through a *historical politics of anxiety*, contextualized within Singapore's history of (geo)political turbulence in Southeast Asia. Hence the Singapore model became a diplomatic tool to strengthen bilateral relations with "big powers" like post-1978 China, leading to the emergence of Sino-Singaporean megaprojects. This can be read through a South-South frame of transnational policy mobilization, an "inter-Asian horizon of metropolitan and

global aspirations" (Ong, 2011, p. 5). But efforts to export the Singapore model to urban China reveal the *practitioner politics of anxiety* that manifest through the perspectives of Singaporean officials, spatialized through the SSTEC's territorial politics. These anxieties are symbolic of the changing relations between the Singapore model and its Chinese audience, redolent of a reversal of power in Sino-Singaporean bilateral relations.

The historical politics of anxiety of the Singapore "model"

> There's always a certain anxiety that our geographic, economic, and political positions are vulnerable. This anxiety is also a galvanizing force, in some ways an obsession. Our success is the result of anxiety, and the anxiety is never fully assuaged by success. Perhaps most city-states feel that way. It keeps people on the ball.
>
> – George Yeo, Singapore's former Minister of Foreign Affairs (Yeo, 1997, p. 30)

Yeo's quote aptly captures the heightened political sensitivity attached to labels such as "success" and "failure" and, more intriguingly, how the two are mutually constitutive through a politics of anxiety. Anxiety, both "galvanizing force" and "obsession," is rooted in state meta-narratives of "vulnerability" and "relevance", productive of a form of success whose momentum is (contradictorily) spurred by fears of failure. Chua (2017, p. 2) frames this positionality as a "generalized anxiety about the long-term viability of the social, economic and political foundation of the island-nation [that] has been transformed into a set of ideological justifications for and instrumental practices of tight social and political control, which taken together constitutes the authoritarianism of the regime." Anxiety characterizes an everyday mode of existence, for the Singaporean state and society, through which success and failure are doubly bound in an awkward yet generative relationship.

As a developmental narrative predicated on the substantiveness of economic achievements and absolute planning control (Shatkin, 2014), the Singapore "model" belies such sentiments of apprehension and fallibility. Over the past five decades, Singapore's varied accomplishments (e.g., rapid economic growth, public housing provision, environmental sustainability) have been considered unprecedented by conventional measures, and are regularly celebrated in international rankings. Visitors to the city-state often depart with the impression that it is a clean, safe, and well-regulated city where things, by and large, simply "work." These contribute to the sense that Singapore is a model worth emulating, aspirational notions that have struck a chord with a wide swathe of developing countries. Paul Kigame, Rwanda's president, wants Rwanda to be the "Singapore of Africa" (The Economist, 2012). The Indian government is developing a "Little Singapore" along the Delhi-Mumbai corridor (Harris, 2012). Shatkin (2014) suggests that the Singapore model is so popular in the Global South, its primary audience, precisely because it offers an alternative ideological formula of growth and governance that deliberately disavows Western-style liberal democracy. To that end, the model is "a valorised object/place … as well as an orientation to the world" in the form of a "self-orientalized Asian success story" (Pow, 2014, p. 288).

Capitalizing on its position in global networks of urban knowledge and the eager appetites of audiences (Peck and Theodore, 2010) , the Singaporean state has risen to

the occasion. If models travel in disaggregated, disembedded forms (Peck, 2011), then segments of the Singapore model have been repackaged by state agencies and state-linked consultancies for export, as discrete parts of a wider success story. State-linked institutions frame their expertise through locally-rooted, homegrown narratives of success, manifesting through calculated appeals to the "Singapore heritage of cost-effective and efficient city planning" (Surbana, 2014, p. 66), although these exports abroad inevitably generate conflicting outcomes (Bok, 2015). Still, as Chua (2011) remarks, the Singapore state remains confident enough of its methods to the extent that various institutions have been established to disseminate this brand of success. The Singapore Civil Service College was founded in 2003 to "share Singapore's experience in public reforms and good governance" (CSC, 2017), while the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy emerged in 2004 to "educate and train the next generation of Asian policy-makers and leaders" (LKYSPP, 2018). Across these benign refrains of "sharing" and "educating," policy success is articulated through the commoditized and circulatory elements of the Singapore model and via the confidence of its architects, embodied and emboldened, to export their systems of governance elsewhere. One interviewee, a former diplomat, framed the Singapore model as an opportunity "to use what we've done well to win friends overseas, [since] we've become an example, a showcase … to create relationships between countries and people" (author's interview, 2014). Such are the bilateral stakes of transnational (urban) policy mobilization, wherein the Singapore model is leveraged as a diplomatic tool to build geopolitical relations.

In reality, this model is the emblematic by-product of a general ethos of success dispersed throughout the nation. "'Success has entered the process of 'self-scripting' of Singapore as a nation and of individual Singaporeans … Iconic achievements all add up, finally, to a sense of arrival at a First World economy … 'Success' as a source of pride has become part of the technologies of the Singaporean self and a constitutive element of the Singapore identity" (Chua, 2011, p. 31–32). Similar to Koch's (2013) study of how Turkic state-led developmental agendas of "modernity" are performed through the popular geographic imaginaries of elites and non-elites alike, ordinary Singaporeans take pride in – and are at pains to defend – the city-state's presumptive identity of success. This popular geographic imaginary of nationalism is not merely imposed from the top-down, but is actively reworked and reproduced from the bottom-up. The Singaporean civil service, comprising both elites and non-elites, bridges this. Yet, such an exaggerated, pronounced perception of success as integral to national identity is, correspondingly, plagued by an amplified awareness of failure, to the point where the prospect of failure becomes indistinguishable from the burden of success. For both citizen and state, anxiety is doubly leveraged, "motivat[ing] individuals to compete fiercely to maintain – better still to extend – their success [while] keep[ing] the government constantly in search of the next niche of development … [as] it needs to extend success for political legitimacy" (Chua, 2011, p. 32).

Framing anxiety as a "galvanizing" socio-political force emphasizes how it is "collective and distributed, rather than solely a property or experience of the individual" (Jackson et al., 2012, p. 24), embodied existentially. For East Asian developmental states, economic success was historically rooted in race-based discourses of "Asian values," or the cultural performance of developmental models that is entangled with postcolonial identity crises (Sioh, 2010). More than a latent sense of unease that afflicts individual state

officials, fear of politico-economic failure is something of a dogma for the national ruling party. Ever-conscious of shifting global terrains underfoot, politicians from the long-ruling People's Action Party (PAP) have cautioned: "Should Singapore be overtaken and be made irrelevant, our influence and international standing will go down" (The Straits Times, 1997). Regularly disseminated through state-owned media, fears of failure are expressed as exhortations for Singaporeans and Singapore to remain "relevant," the PAP's doctrine. One interviewee bluntly said: "If you are relevant, you have a reason to exist. If you don't know anything of use to anyone, you are forever cut out of the market" (author's interview, 2015). Modeling, as a success-oriented technology of governance, is driven by the enterprise of (developmental) state capitalism: it is entrenched in present and future ideologies of national socio-economic growth, directed at cultivating desirable citizen-subjects, and enacted through regulatory technologies (Hoffman, 2011). For the PAP, prospects of politico-economic decline convey a palpable sense of anxiety, wherein success and failure are articulated through the existential tones of relevance and irrelevance to the world.

This political ideology of vulnerability that permeates state agendas is historically rooted in Singapore's expulsion from Malaysia in 1965, and the antagonism it received from Indonesia in the aftermath of *Konfrontasi* during the 1960s, in the wake of British decolonization. The idea of a sovereign Singapore then was considered a "political, economic, and geographical absurdity," primarily because the continued existence of a small island city-state that lacked a hinterland, and was populated predominantly by overseas ethnic Chinese amidst the "Malay world" of Southeast Asia, namely its neighbors Malaysia and Indonesia, was deemed an impossibility (Acharya, 2008). Official representations of that "founding moment" continue to paint it as a traumatic political experience, serving to define a national predicament and justify a national watchword of "vulnerability" that remains "continually confronted by prospects of political extinction" (Leifer, 2000, p. 1). The state has never taken Singapore's sovereignty for granted. The expulsion produced a deep security complex that continues to shape the conduct and culture of its foreign policy to negotiate vulnerability as a small city-state. An interviewee, another diplomat, stressed: "Singapore is a city-state – you cannot say that if the city fails, you have the hinterland. If Singapore fails, there's *nothing* left" (author's interview, 2014). Such is the utter existentialism of (the prospect of) failure, politically amplified and inseparable from the sovereignty of a small state.

Within the wider Southeast Asian and Pacific Asian region, fears of conflict with its closest neighbors, Malaysia and Indonesia, remain longstanding preoccupations of the Singapore state. The sense of national confidence engendered by success also expresses itself as a "quality of hubris" that arouses "admiration mixed with envy and resentment within [Singapore's] regional locale, where its success has been represented at having come at the expense of its close neighbors" (Leifer, 2000, p. 41). This explains why the Singapore model is consistently viewed with suspicion by Malaysia and Indonesia, who remain distrustful of Singapore's "neocolonial" economic aspirations (Bunnell et al., 2006). It underscores the uneven reception of models, together with the compounded awareness of political vulnerability and anxiety that, for this small city-state, is interlocked with success. The (geo)politics of anxiety are both historically predicated upon, and contradictorily productive of, the intertwining of success and failure.

The Singapore state is constantly searching for new ways to ameliorate political anxieties. Over the last three decades, the state's export of the Singapore model has been framed as a diplomatic opportunity to build and strengthen bilateral relationships with "big powers" in the region, most notably China. An interviewee brought up the Singapore model, saying: "We want to engage China, using what we've done well as a way to make good friends" (author's interview, 2014). This was a common refrain over the interviews. Sino-Singapore geopolitical relations are constituted through a stream of policy exports within customized institutional architectures that aim to promote substantive exchanges of expertise and interpersonal interactions between (ideally) high-ranking state officials. Beginning as a tentative enterprise, this bilateral relationship grew from the Singaporean state's interest in maintaining a regional balance of power that would deny undue dominance to any one country (Singh, 1988). Sino-Singapore relations were tense in the 1950s and 60s owing to China's support of Communist insurgency movements in Southeast Asia, which threatened to overthrow postcolonial governments in the region. As a newly independent nation, Singapore's stance was to ease the concerns of its neighbors, who were wary of Chinese intentions in Southeast Asia (Acharya, 2008). A turning point came in the form of Richard Nixon's visit to Beijing in 1972, which impelled Deng Xiaoping, the-then leader of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to visit Southeast Asia in 1978. Deng was apparently impressed by the social and economic progress Singapore had attained since independence, marking the start of positive portrayals of Singapore in Chinese state media as "a garden city worth studying for its greenery, public housing and tourism" (Lee & Yew, 2000, p. 65), for Deng had seen for himself that it was possible to combine one-party governance with economic growth. In 1992, Deng embarked on his "southern tour" around China, during which he explicitly singled out Singapore as a model: "Singapore's social order is rather good. Its leaders exercise strict management. We should learn from their experience, and do a better job" (Kristof, 1992). The CCP duly dispatched a senior delegation to Singapore, returning with proclamations of Singapore as a model to be emulated, thereby instantiating a deeper engagement between the two political regimes. This would set in motion tens of thousands of "learning" visits by Chinese delegates to Singapore over the next three decades, highlighting not just the presence of organized and institutionalized policy exchange, but also a "wider cultural diplomacy … strikingly different from … policy tourism today" (Cook et al., 2014, p. 818).

For its own part, modeling has been a longstanding element of Chinese rule since the 1920s to experimentally advance agendas and shape society. Bakken (2000) documents how model citizens and sites have been upheld as exemplars to emulate, signposts for where Chinese society should be heading. More internationally, the CCP has turned from Soviet-inspired practices of industrial economic development to contemporary models based on cities such Kitakyushu and Singapore (Hoffman, 2011). The choice of which places to anoint as "models" remains politically driven. As a formerly socialist country undergoing capitalist reform, China was reluctant to uphold an advanced capitalist nation as a developmental model. And neither Taiwan nor Hong Kong, which continue to be viewed as integral elements of Chinese sovereignty, was considered suitable (Wong & Goldblum, 2000). As a post-colony and a small, non-threatening nation, Singapore was an ideologically suitable option. One interviewee matter-of-factly remarked, "Nobody feels threatened by Singapore. If this were Indonesia or Malaysia, China would say, what

are you trying to do? But we are just so *small*" (author's interview, 2014). For Beijing, therefore, Singapore represented the capitalist counterpart of the Communist dream (Cartier, 1995), a developmental narrative *par excellence* orchestrated by an authoritarian state with a history of single-party rule. The choice of Singapore was therefore a politically mediated one, congruent with dominant Chinese regime goals.

Amongst the range of Sino-Singaporean bilateral exchanges over the last three decades, the export of the Singapore model to urban China, through inter-governmental infrastructural megaprojects such as the SSSIP and the SSTEC, has been lauded as the pinnacle of Sino-Singaporean bilateral relations. State officials use the terminology of "software transfer" to characterize the export of Singapore's "accumulated and proven methods of development and administration … [based on] its successful experiences" to Chinese government, such that Chinese officials might "understand the Singapore way … and decide how best to adapt Singapore's practices for local circumstances" (Pereira, 2002, p. 129). Similar to Easterling's (2014, p. 26) software metaphor which depicts how "the dominant formula that generates Shenzhens and Dubais" is a particular way of "making urban space" in the likeness of someplace else, G-G projects operate on the assumption that the Singapore model can more or less be easily transplanted into foreign settings, allowing Chinese policymaking to "capture some aspect, style, or essence of that original" (Ong, 2011, p. 15). This "formula," or the performance of a rational, methodical transfer of policy expertise, is enacted through training programs and learning tours, during which Chinese state officials are trained by their Singaporean counterparts in different aspects of development.

G-G projects are governed through a distinctive institutional architecture that prioritizes heavy state (central and municipal) involvement and political resources in order to ensure that the project comes to fruition. Collaboration occurs at two main levels. At the strategic level, a Joint Steering Committee and a Joint Working Committee meet every three months to chart project overviews and implementation. At the operational level, Chinese and Singaporean policymakers have formed administrative committees to supervise key domains of urban development (e.g., urban planning, environmental protection). Such "organizational cultures" (Schäefer, 2017), or state structures, shape policy mobilization path-dependently by generating ideological and institutional legacies across political generations. Interviewees emphasized the unusually high levels of state support that were channeled toward the SSTEC. An economic planner noted: "With G-G projects, you know there's the commitment to implementation, unlike private sector projects" (author's interview, 2014). This political "commitment" suggests that outcomes of the SSTEC symbolize the health of Sino-Singaporean bilateral relations. With these "exception[al]" (Caprotti, 2015, p. 36) state resources, the assumption for Singaporean state officials was that if the Singapore model could be successfully exported anywhere, it would be under such circumstances. The SSTEC is interesting, therefore, in that it carries an almost *presumptive* air of success, within which fears of failure are cloaked. Singaporean officials labor under the belief that *if* the Singapore model could be successfully exported anywhere, it would be under such interstate-enabled circumstances in China. They ask, almost rhetorically: if not here, then where?

The practitioner politics of anxiety in the Sino-Singapore Tianjin eco-city

"There's always a risk. But there is the impression that this is an inter-governmental project, it's not allowed to fail, so the risk, compared with going to other places in China,

might be lower," a Singaporean official explained to me during discussions of how firms might be persuaded to invest in the SSTEC. When pressed to elaborate on what "not allowed to fail" meant, the official emphasized the SSTEC's special status. How many top Singaporean civil servants, she asked, could be channeled into a project on foreign territory? Doing so would show the Chinese leadership how much the Singaporean state valued the project. Others commented that the progress of the SSTEC would reflect on Sino-Singaporean bilateral relations. On the surface of it, and largely related to the fact that it has undergone physical materialization amidst a sea of unfinished projects, the SSTEC impresses upon onlookers near and far ideals of "success." Furthermore, the SSTEC possesses green building credentials that are yoked to international standards, such as LEED, and boasts its own Key Performance Indicator framework (SSTEC, 2019), comprising benchmarks and deliverables. Such metrics project future progress and invite comparative emulation. Singaporean officials regularly feature the SSTEC in conferences and learning tours for developing countries, as evidence for how (and where) the Singapore model has "worked," constituting the projective "knowledge effects" (Merry, 2011) that radiate the banal essence of success through the performative power of repetition. Such approaches have proved salient in Chinese urbanization, where the "design of eco-cities in China has been distinctively characterized by an abundance of images as a form of communication of ideas" (Morera, 2017, p. 190).

The major source of "practitioner anxiety" stems from changing Sino-Singaporean power dynamics between a developmental model and an audience that was systematically courted for decades. Doucette (2020, p. 6) contextualizes "practitioner anxiety" in how "the meaning of Korean development occupies a zone of awkward engagement", complicating the seeming straightforwardness of knowledge-sharing by examining how the "anxieties that shape specific efforts to construct and circulate development experience narratives afflict those tasked with sharing them … show[ing] how new connections and flows in development cooperation and knowledge sharing also create anxious and awkward engagements." For Doucette (2020, p. 3), anxiety assumes the "mundane form of uncertainty among professionals … [and] everyday subjective feelings and reflections." Every practitioner arguably faces some anxiety during projects when things inevitably go awry. Singaporean state officials experience anxiety via banal feelings of uncertainty, resignation, and thinly-veiled antagonism toward the actions of their Chinese counterparts. Situated in the historical politics of anxiety experienced by a small city-state that is dealing with a "big power," such interstate interactions take on an existential bent. In other words, state anxiety and practitioner anxiety become nearly indistinguishable in the context of a (geo)political backdrop against which Singaporean officials experience feel a palpable sense of expiration regarding their "relevance" for Chinese officials, culminating in the sense that the Singapore model is now appreciated more for its performance of success rather than any functional prospects of genuine policy exchange and learning. Examining "anxiety in practice" (Doucette, 2020) from the perspective of Singaporean officials shows how geopolitical scripts of state "vulnerability" and "relevance" are reproduced and grappled with on the symbolic terrain of the SSTEC.

As the predecessor of the SSTEC, the fate of the SSSIP warrants some mention in order to contextualize the practitioner anxiety faced by Singaporean officials during the SSTEC project, as they negotiated the SSSIP's legacy of an embarrassing "failure." As the first Sino-Singaporean G-G project, the SSSIP was established in 1994, boldly hailed as

a pioneering enterprise in software transfer to export the Singaporean state's expertise in urban-industrial development to Chinese government (Pereira, 2002). By the early 1990s, though, there were hundreds of industrial estates in Chinese city-regions developed by municipal governments, an early hint of the scalar disjunctures between Singaporean and Chinese political economies. Nonetheless, the Singaporean state remained confident that the SSSIP possessed distinctive competitive advantages in the form of the "Singapore brand name," an offshoot of the Singapore model that indicated "policy credibility" (Huff, 1995) to assure investors new to post-1978 China that the park was of reliable, international standards. Distilled into various forms of "reputational capital" (Phelps, 2007), the Singapore model was viewed by Chinese state officials as crucial for territorially embedding investments in Chinese city-regions. The SSSIP initially took off, but started suffering financially three years later owing to its inability to compete with a rival industrial estate: the Suzhou New District. The Suzhou Municipal Government originally offered this site for the location of the SSSIP but the Singaporean state declined, preferring to develop its own project from scratch. Ironically, the rival district's success stemmed from the Singapore state's effectiveness in exporting the Singapore model to Suzhou. Chinese officials from the District were able to "observe, absorb and reproduce the [SSSIP's] 'international standard' practice . . . [and were] quick to learn how to market the estate internationally" (Pereira, 2002, p. 132). The Singaporean state officially left the SSSIP in 2001, selling 30% of its shares to the Chinese consortium to give the latter majority ownership. For Singaporean officials, the key indicator of failure was the dramatic exit of the Singapore state from what had been trumpeted as a groundbreaking inter-governmental project. The "Suzhou fiasco" (Pereira, 2002, p. 141), labeled as such by the public for what was perceived as a wastage of resources beyond Singapore's domestic confines, triggered defensive responses from state officials, in turn revealing the difficulties of exporting the Singapore model elsewhere and the domestic dissent generated by "failure" abroad.

From the perspectives of Singaporean state officials, this exit was framed as a key rupture of the SSSIP, highlighting two instances of failure during this inaugural effort to export the Singapore model to China: the inability to overcome interlocal competition; and the incapacity to comprehend central-local Chinese state politics. The first concerned a short-termist, entrepreneurial outlook in Chinese municipal governance that continues to be tied to the generation of fiscal revenue and political legitimacy, termed "GDP-ism" (Wu, 2016). Following expanded devolution and market entrepreneurialism, the performance of municipal officials has been evaluated through their ability to meet growth targets set by the central state, hence the emergence of competing developments and territorial politics that indicate uneven local state control over land (Chien & Gordon, 2008). The second arose from the unfamiliarity of Singaporean policymakers – who are accustomed to "micro-manag[ing]" (Lim Kean Fan, & Horesh, Niv, 2016, p. 1005) social, political, and economic matters at the urban-national scale (Olds & Yeung, 2004) – in negotiating the spatio-scalar complexities of Chinese administration. It has been acknowledged by the PAP and external critics that Singaporean officials overly focused on cultivating personal relationships with central state officials; this came at the expense of relations with municipal state officials, who were misjudged by Singaporean officials as incapable of acting independently of the central state. This scalar disjuncture reflected fundamental contradictions of the attempt to export a model from

a city-state to a multi-level bureaucracy. For Singaporean state officials, the most pertinent question surrounding the SSTEC was whether "the Suzhou experience would re-emerge" (Lim & Horesh, 2016, p. 1008). Would the SSTEC, as the second concerted inter-governmental effort to export the Singapore model abroad, be tainted by associations with failure? These compounded fears, coupled with already-existing (geo)political insecurities embodied by state officials, took the form of practitioner-based anxieties that manifested during the SSTEC project. If the historical politics of anxiety previously discussed were explicitly existential, then the practitioner anxiety that surfaces here can be interpreted as (geo)political existentialism in practice.

The Singaporean officials with whom I interacted displayed, almost consistently, a heightened sensitivity to the topic of transnational policy mobilization, especially vis-à-vis sovereignty, revealing attitudes of precarity when dealing with the world from the positionality of a small state. A senior Singaporean official who had led the SSTEC's green building policy was triggered by my mention of "policy transfer," remaining adamant that policy could not be "transferred" for reasons of national sovereignty:

> Since this is a joint venture, the Chinese will not want to adopt the Green Mark [Singapore's official green building policy]. As a sovereign nation, we don't want other countries imposing policies on us … it's national pride. (author's interview, 2014)

The vernacular of "transfer," amplified through the precarious dealings between small and big states, was framed as a potential threat to bilateral relations. Other Singaporean officials seemed wary of (verbally) overstepping political boundaries surrounding ostensibly benign notions of policy sharing and learning. Many demurred to position Singapore as a "model" or to use terms like "educate" in the context of policy learning. Curiously, this reticence starkly contrasts more confident, emphatic declarations at closed-door workshops on the Singapore model and its global viability. I have witnessed the inflationary posturing of Singaporean officials during encounters with smaller cities in developing Southeast Asian countries, such as the Philippines and Vietnam, when it comes to "selling" the Singapore model and summarily peddling the portfolios of Singaporean planning consultancies. These divergences constitute the mobilities of urban models, or a geography of scripted superiority. The comparatively deferential attitude toward the Chinese state makes sense when situated within small-big state relations, especially considering how the Chinese audience has been systematically cultivated for decades in a fashion unusual for any other country in Singapore's foreign policy. Herein lie the power dynamics in policy mobilization that are inextricable from positioning one party as a "teacher" and another as a "learner." If anxiety in practice can be interpreted as the uneven manifestation of a latent quality of defensiveness, then the context in which anxiety rears its head is a politically significant question that foregrounds power in social relations, complicating literalist notions of policy "transfer" to account for nationalist concerns.

More prominently, practitioner anxiety results from how Singaporean officials have perceived the changing attitudes of Chinese officials toward the Singapore model from the SSSIP to the SSTEC. Singaporean officials reinforced their fears over these changing dynamics, which signified a reversal in dependence. A junior official reflected on how "we

still have quite a privileged position with China, although that's diminishing." When asked to elaborate on this "diminishing" position, she replied:

> As China opens up, it has more direct channels with other parts of the world; it doesn't need to keep depending on Singapore. During Suzhou we were the bridge … as China rises, it needs us less and less … That's why we are more dependent on them. (author's interview, 2014)

A retired senior official who had been involved in both projects compared the shifting power dynamics:

> At this point of China's development they are no longer like they were during the Suzhou days …. they were very *blur*, no money, no track record, no expertise – which is why, in Suzhou, Singapore took complete charge … basically they listened to us. Tianjin came 15 years later. Now the Chinese have money, quite well-established. They are full of confidence, everyone is going into China. The Chinese jokingly tell us, why do we need you? You are so small, we are so big. (author's interview, 2014)

These quotes are from senior and junior officials, indicating the reproduction of practitioner and state anxiety, along with a tacit acceptance of state (geo)political scripts of "vulnerability" and "relevance" to frame Singapore's place in the world. Where Singaporean officials once saw themselves performing the integral role of a "bridge" between an emergent China and the rest of the world – a role that must have seemed phenomenal to a small city-state – they now have to contend with a growing realization that the tables have turned. The asymmetry in dependency that was apparent during the SSSIP, and which has progressively shrunk, is in fact the contradictory power relations of a model laid bare. One of the ultimate contradictions of a model, at least in practice, is that if a model works to the genuine learning advantages of its audience, its utility in turn declines. After all, successful policy transfer is fundamentally contingent upon, and reproduced through, a perceived asymmetry between the parties concerned, notwithstanding changing ideological parameters of "success" itself (e.g., Zhang, 2012 on Shenzhen's shifting aspirations from Hong Kong to Singapore). Arguably, it was only a matter of time before these global shifts came home to roost, raising the temporal question of how long the architects of a model might retain its legitimacy for audiences – hence the conundrum of expiration, or when model co-production dissolves. There remain attempts, nonetheless, to assuage anxiety by continuing to engage Chinese audiences through highlighting new developments in Singapore, since "we have to pursue them and show our relevance … otherwise we will be left behind" (author's interview, 2014).

Practitioner anxieties manifested spatially, and perhaps most dramatically, through land disputes and shifting territorial boundaries, resulting in crucial disruptions and delays. Publicly, the SSTEC is framed as a bilateral collaboration between the Singaporean and Chinese central governments; on the ground, its fate is determined by the subnational governments of the Tianjin Municipality and the regional Tianjin-Binhai New Area (TBNA) that oversee its everyday operations. The SSTEC was originally planned as a stand-alone 3 km2 site – with a dedicated "green" transportation system – but conflicting interstate priorities and attempts by different levels of Chinese government to integrate the SSTEC into wider regional configurations have complicated matters. During the initial negotiations, it was agreed that the Singaporean state's efforts would be limited to the 3 km2 site. Subsequently, to capitalize on collective Sino-Singaporean efforts and resources, the TBNA government unilaterally decided that the

SSTEC's territorial boundaries should be expanded to include a tourism district. A Singaporean official said, exasperatedly:

> We conveyed that our collaboration is still within the 3km2 … we shouldn't even be debating. But this is the truth about working with the Chinese. They will change, so we need to stand firm … The tourism district did their own masterplan and now they say it's under the eco-city. But it's not. We need to stay focused. (author's interview, 2014)

Another complained about this instability of Chinese policymaking, which was interpreted as an unwelcome yet characteristically entrepreneurial act of "piggybacking" onto interstate efforts that had garnered traction: "They were already planning the tourism district alongside the eco-city, but they only told us later … Once the Chinese see you taking off and doing well, they will redraw the masterplan to help adjoining cities" (author's interview, 2014). Several officials noted that the biggest challenge was the establishment of extensive transportation linkages within the SSTEC itself, and between the SSTEC and Tianjin Municipality. They expressed frustration over the delays experienced in convincing Chinese officials to commit to building these forms of infrastructure, and bemoaned the loss of eco-friendly transportation which they saw as critical to the SSTEC's measure of "greenness." These disruptions in transportation planning, resultant of the Singaporean state's continuing inability to negotiate scalar disjunctures in Chinese governance, had wider repercussions. They triggered the departure of leading international developers that were needed to develop the SSTEC, demonstrating how the SSTEC's "greenness" depended on the inclusion of developers to transfer green technology across space (Bok & Coe, 2017), but also reflecting the speculativeness of new-build developments more generally (see Upadhya, 2020). A Singaporean interviewee, who was the pioneering CEO of the SSTEC, was the most disgruntled of the lot, viewing their loss as the reason why he considered the project:

> … a super failure. Because transportation is gone, many things have fallen aside. The developers signed, thinking there'd be transport, but they've now all left. Development is stuck in the first phase. When they gave up my LRT [transportation network], it was the stupidest thing … Even my own government was on their side! You should be fighting for the interests of Singapore! When I look back, this project helped me make up my mind to leave the civil service. (author's interview, 2015)

Behind the benign performance of mutually beneficial interstate projects, wherein South-South exchanges are popularly portrayed as "idealized, if imaginary, concept[s] of horizontal, more equal, win-win interaction[s]" (Horner, 2016, p. 402), old tensions rear their heads. Here, changing power dynamics in Sino-Singaporean bilateral relations, and the corresponding reversal in relations of dependence, emerged in direct conflicts not just between states, but within the Singaporean delegation itself regarding how much Singaporean officials were expected to acquiesce during bilateral negotiations. While most interviewees chose to ascribe feelings of resignation to the realities of how a small state should behave when working with a "big power," a few went against the grain in order to secure what they felt was "in Singapore's interest." Other than surfacing an unacknowledged streak of nationalism during transnational urban policy mobilization, this also illustrates the range of attitudes within the "institutional ensembles" that are state delegations (Jessop, 2016). This ex-CEO also commented on land disputes during the early stages of planning:

> I chanced upon a masterplan on my Chinese consortium Chairman's table. He cut it out, like a warlord, for big Chinese developers. He didn't share it with me, but I could see all the Chinese developers and their friends claiming plots of land. I was furious; I felt trapped. If I didn't work harder, they would sell all the land. And when you fail to bring in investors, the Chinese will say, don't worry, I help you [laughs]. (author's interview, 2015)

Ostensibly, the main selling point of the SSTEC was the Sino-Singaporean central state backing and technocratic expertise that was intended to be collaboratively channeled into every stage of the project. For some Singaporean officials, however, it seemed that their Chinese counterparts were, in a sense, already planning for failure by unilaterally allocating prime land in ways they considered more suitable, revealing the hollowness of bilateral scripts of mutual benefit. This preemptive position regarding the seeming utility of Singaporean policy expertise was echoed by another Singaporean official who had led the SSTEC's masterplanning:

> For the first meeting, we met our Chinese partners, but we got a huge shock. They *kay kiang* [Singaporean colloquium to describe rashness] and already came up with their own masterplan! It was done by the Tianjin Planning Academy – they also brought in the national planning academy. (author's interview, 2014)

These instances cast ambiguity upon the specific role of the Singapore model for an intergovernmental project whose credibility was, and continues to be, marketed on this very basis of Singapore-branded urban expertise. Apart from the acknowledged performativity of masterplanning artifices and architects, they also raise questions surrounding claims of (substantive) policy exchange and learning that are trumpeted during such projects. The difficulty of making qualitative distinctions between deliberate learning and more superficial forms of inter-referencing implies that "learning" remains a politically and temporally constrained and filtered process (Peck, 2011). Such barriers are suggestive of deeper ideological underpinnings that transcend individual policies or projects (May, 1992). Here, they must be situated in changing Sino-Singaporean bilateral relations, predicated on the knowledge that Chinese audiences no longer view the Singapore model as favorably as before. An official drily commented: "They still need the Singapore 'brand,' but they don't want you to cause trouble. They can do everything on their own" (author's interview, 2014). Compared to the SSSIP, when Singapore "took complete charge," the SSTEC relies on a more hollowed-out version of the Singapore model as a token of deference to certain international norms. Rather than any real interest in Singapore, Chinese engagements with the Singapore model are expressed through the motivation of advancing inward-looking agendas through profuse inter-referencing (Lim & Horesh, 2016). Sioh (2010, p. 582) references a somewhat similar state of emptiness regarding the economic success of Asian developmental states in the wake of the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis: such models were "'hollowed out' by the not-said – the anxieties and assumptions underpinning and influencing policy decisions," reflective of postcolonial state policymaking. Ultimately, nearly three decades of Sino-Singaporean policy interchanges have culminated in the reverse-engineering of a developmental model, whose architects can be kept backstage until they are wheeled out at international conferences, bilateral photo-ops, and policy tours.

Conclusion

"The window is closing" is a metaphor that was constantly invoked by Singaporean officials, encapsulating the shrinking asymmetry in Sino-Singaporean relations of knowledge and power. Grimly aware of this fast-eroding scope of "relevance," the Singaporean state is shifting its sights to new pastures of knowledge-sharing to bolster its bilateral alliances with other big powers:

> The Chief Minister of Andra Pradesh visited recently. We … *entertain* them, so to speak. After China, window closing, right? India is five times worse but you still have to do it. You cannot align yourself with one big power and completely neglect another. India will say, "You built a few cities in China, why are you not doing one for me?" (author's interview, 2014, original emphasis)

These shifting (geo)politics of knowledge mobility reflect how a small city-state, once again, reorients itself in relation to another "big power," leveraging its expertise in urban development to forge bilateral alliances anew. Using the case of the Singapore "model" and its export to urban China via the bilateral vectors of the SSTEC, this paper has argued that categories of "success" and "failure" are relationally co-produced through a politics of anxiety. Situated in Singapore's positionality as a small island-city-state in Southeast Asia, "anxiety" captures its state of being, wherein the burden of success – almost an affliction – and the fear of failure become nearly indistinguishable. As explored above, these dynamics are expressed through the *historical politics of anxiety*, where Singapore's particular form of success and bilateral engagements are shown to be driven by anxiety over its positionality in Southeast and Pacific Asia, and through the *practitioner politics of anxiety*, where anxiety manifests through the practices of Singaporean officials in the development of the SSTEC. The Singapore model, a signifier of "success" in the Global South, is framed as a (geo)political mode of engagement between the Singaporean and Chinese states, reinforced by exports abroad that work to reaffirm (or not) the broader legacy of the model. The instances of "failure" experienced by Singaporean officials in the SSTEC capture not only the ambivalence of "success" itself but, more significantly, how what is considered as "failure" transcends individual projects and is in reality reflective of broader (geo)political circumstances, culminating in the "hollowing out" of a signifier of success.

The paper therefore advances existing scholarship in two ways. First, countering critiques of success-centrism in policy mobility research, it illustrates how success and failure are relationally bound (see Lovell, 2019; McCann & Ward, 2015). Second, in response to critiques of presentism (see Clarke, 2012; Jacobs, 2012), it delivers a historical treatment of policy mobilization by historicizing the emergence of the Singapore model and by investigating a case of South-South state projects of policy mobilization, charting the decline of the Singapore model in urban China over time.

Several overlapping conclusions for future research emerge. The interplay between occurrences of failure in the SSSIP and SSTEC projects, within the wider Sino-Singaporean policy relationship, indicates the path-dependent quality of significant failures to persist beyond projects. This reinforces the need for policy mobilities scholarship to pay attention to the structural contexts – specifically, state-level geopolitical relationships – of transnational policy mobilization. The politics of anxiety here are relatively distinct to Singapore's fairly unique positionality as a small city-state that

has embarked on transnational dealings with big powers, but they call attention to how the broader positionality of states can influence nationally-inflected relations of power during transnational policy mobilization. Additionally, this case highlights the limits to (assumptions of) post-failure policy learning, which requires long-term investigation in order to critically assess the claims of actors that seek to preserve a model's legitimacy.

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