

Excerpts from “AI Governance in Parliamentary Democracies”
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Insights into Singapore’s National AI Strategy

"AI for the public good, for Singapore and the world" is the motto for Singapore's AI strategy which aims at harnessing the power and calculated risk of the country's earned tradition of foresighted early adopter of innovation, especially in reversible decisions. It provides an agile corridor of navigation for institutional governance that is adaptive and evolving, for Singapore's well-educated, dynamic and creative population.

Unlike countries which tend to go back, in a Sisyphean cycle, to the drawing board, Singapore national AI strategy capitalizes on cutting-edge intelligence in science, technology and governance, and AI Singapore’s founder and executive chairman, Ho Teck Hua and deputy executive chairman, Mohan Kankanhalli, in collaboration with technical and scientific leaders: Luke Ong, Bryan Low, Ng See Kiong, Laurence Liew, Leslie Teo, Simon Chesterman for whom “the challenge is how to avoid under-regulating — meaning you expose your citizens to risk — or over-regulating, meaning you might drive innovation elsewhere and miss out on the opportunities.” (Rina Chandran, Feb. 25, 2024, www.context.news/ai/singapore-embraces-ai-to-solve-everyday-problems). The progressive 2024 budget (www.mof.gov.sg/singaporebudget) includes unprecedented lifelong AI full-time education and skills-upgrading incentives for students and adult workers to "remains potentially employable, regardless of age".

The AI strategy also builds on the pioneering heritage of the country's exemplary civil servants, led by two distinguished Harvard graduates and strategy trailblazers, namely Tharman Shanmugaratnam and Philip Yeo.

Tharman (as officially addressed) held the portfolios of education, finance, social policies, deputy prime minister, senior minister and chaired the Monetary Authority, the tripartite Council for Skills, Innovation and Productivity (CSIP) and the ‘SkillsFuture’ programme, prior to his election as president of Singapore in 2023. He chaired several international groups, including the IMF Policy Forum, the G20 Eminent Persons Group on Global Financial Governance and the distinguished Group of Thirty (G30).

In his seminal book titled “Capitalism: Its Origins and Evolution as a System of Governance” (2009, ISBN 978-1-4614-1878-8), Prof. Bruce Scott wrote: “Visiting [Tharman] in Singapore some years ago he explained how the Monetary Authority could help to finance venture capital if that were needed, even if it was not a traditional activity of central banks, which exemplifies the can-do esprit of government in Singapore.

Mr. Yeo “was Chairman of Standards Productivity and Innovation for Growth (SPRING), a government development agency with the mission to grow small and medium enterprises and startups. Yeo was Special Adviser for Economic Development in the Prime Minister's Office (2007-2011), Senior Adviser for Science and Technology, Ministry of Trade & Industry (2007-2008), Executive Chairman of the Agency for Science, Technology & Research (2001-2007), Executive Chairman of the Economic Development Board (1986-2001), Executive Co-Chairman of the Economic Development Board (2001-2006), Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Defence for Defence Research, Logistics and Industry (1979-1985).” (Excerpt from Wikipedia on Feb. 19, 2024)

Some leading economists frame Singapore’s economic system of value creation, extraction and distribution, as state capitalism. That designation can be confusing given its high power of connotation. It rather applies to “countries where the means of production are nationalized... [or] include the state dominance of corporatized government agencies” (excerpt from Wikipedia on Feb. 19, 2024), as in China. To prevent confusion, I prefer agnostic pragmatic caring capitalism. Singapore’s long-tenure tradition, among top civil servants, and high commitment to learning and ethical excellence, may account for the enduring stability, progress and innovative policy-making, and ultimately to a sustainable socio-economic system.