

Beyond Transit: The Role of Changi Airport in Singaporean Society

Victor Carrier

Department of Geography, McGill University, Montréal (Québec) Canada, 2024

Supervisor: Dr. Sarah Moser, Reader: Dr. Sarah Turner

Changi Airport, situated in Singapore, stands as a global aviation icon, evolving from a military base to a world-class transit hub. Recognized worldwide with hundreds of awards, Changi is an important part of Singapore's economy and national landscape. It accommodates more than xx million international passengers per year, making it the busiest airport in Southeast Asia. At home, however, Changi has emerged as more than a transportation hub. It plays a vital role in Singaporean society, both physically and symbolically, and the state's strategic planning and investment in Changi Airport have not only propelled it to international acclaim but also lead to an unplanned, grassroots use of Changi by locals. This thesis has two interrelated strands of investigation. First, I examine the ways in which the Singapore state sought to develop Changi into one of the top airports in the world while tying the airport's ambitions and achievements to Singapore's national identity. I demonstrate that the state has carefully curated discursive representations of Changi from the moment the airport was opened. Second, I explore how Changi, despite being a high-profile state project that is emblematic of Singapore's global ambition, has been used by Singapore residents for a variety of purposes beyond air travel. These uses have only increased in recent years as the state realizes that attracting local visitors to the airport in times of decreased air travel is important to maintain the strong link that already bonds local populations to the airport. From the perspective of locals, Changi is a de facto public place that locals appropriate for themselves, effectively blurring the line between public and private space.



*Jewel at Changi Airport
Source: Author*