

Lecture III  
"Singapore's Story: A Port City in Search of Hinterlands"

by

Professor Tan Tai Yong  
6<sup>th</sup> S R Nathan Fellow for the Study of Singapore

Wednesday, 30 January 2019

**PROGRAMME**

5.45 pm – 6.25 pm

**Registration**

6.25 pm – 6.30 pm

**Guests to be seated**

6.30 pm – 7.30 pm

**Lecture by**

Professor Tan Tai Yong

7.30 pm – 8.00 pm

**Question-and-Answer Session**

**Moderated by**

Professor Chua Beng Huat  
Social Science (Urban Studies)  
Yale-NUS College  
and  
Department of Sociology  
Faculty of Art and Social Sciences  
National University of Singapore

8.00 pm

**End**

## SYNOPSIS

### The Theme

In 2019, Singapore marks the bicentennial of a significant turning point in its history – the arrival of the East India Company and the establishment of a British trading settlement on the island in 1819. Marking a bicentennial might suggest that 1819 was a point of origin, where it all began. But, did our history begin in 1819? What was Singapore before the *Indiana* landed on its shores, and how far back does our history go? The Bicentennial is perhaps an opportune occasion to think more deeply about our history and to reflect on whether that history has meaning for our present and future.

In this lecture series, Professor Tan seeks to explain how Singapore has evolved over a period of 700 years. Throughout its long history, Singapore has taken many forms – trading port, colony, port city and city state – and its evolution was often influenced by external forces and factors. He will identify some of the underlying continuities to show that history is not merely a thing of the past; but by understanding how our island has been shaped by its history, we will have a better appreciation of our current and continued challenges as a city-state.

### Lecture III: "Singapore's Story: A Port City in Search of Hinterlands"

Professor Tan's lecture will offer a fresh perspective on how Singapore's evolution as a port city has fundamentally shaped its economy and society for over 700 years. Along the way, he explores concepts of hinterlands, arguing that Singapore has had a history of shifting hinterlands. From the 14th to 19th centuries, its hinterland was maritime Southeast Asia. It was only from the 19th and 20th centuries, particularly with the completion of the Causeway in 1923, that the Malay Peninsula became a key land-based hinterland for Singapore. After 1965, the situation changed again. One of the main plots of the Singapore story is flux and a restless search for hinterlands.

## SPEAKER'S PROFILE

**TAN Tai Yong** is the Institute of Policy Studies' 6th S R Nathan Fellow for the Study of Singapore.

Professor Tan is President and Professor of Humanities (History) at Yale-NUS College. Prior to becoming president in July 2017, he served as the College's Executive Vice President (Academic Affairs) from 2014 to 2017.

A graduate of NUS, Professor Tan completed his doctorate at Cambridge University. He has been a faculty member of the NUS Department of History since 1992 and served the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences as Sub-Dean (1994–1999), Head of the History Department (2000–2003), Vice-Dean (2001–2003), and Dean (2004–2009). Professor Tan was previously the Vice Provost (Student Life) (2010–2014) at NUS. He was the Founding Director of the Institute of South Asian Studies, an autonomous university-level research institute in NUS, serving from 2004 to 2015. He received Teaching Excellence Awards in 1992 and 2000.

Professor Tan served as a Nominated Member of Parliament from 2014 to 2015. He was awarded the Public Administration Medal (Silver) at the 2009 National Day Awards.

## THE S R NATHAN FELLOWSHIP FOR THE STUDY OF SINGAPORE

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