



The Singapore *Bicentennial* Conference

Fairmont Ballroom, Raffles City Convention Centre
30 September to 1 October 2019

CONFERENCE CONCEPT

The Singapore Bicentennial Conference programme has been designed to examine not only Singapore's 200-year history since Sir Stamford Raffles arrived in 1819. It also delves into the older story of Singapore as a bustling emporium connected to regional trade networks at least 500 years before Raffles. Another important aspect of the conference is the examination of the evolution of governance in a successful post-colonial state.

Historians and international thought leaders will discuss the global context of Singapore's history before, during and after British colonialism. This will help the audience reflect on the ways this history can provide important ballast for the country as it navigates the uncertain age that the world seems to have entered.

The conference comprises a dialogue session with the Guest of Honour, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance, Mr Heng Swee Keat and five plenary sessions, each with two speakers and a chairperson.

PROGRAMME

MONDAY, 30 SEPTEMBER 2019

3.15 pm – 4.00 pm

Registration

4.00 pm – 4.15 pm

Opening Remarks

Mr Janadas Devan
Director
Institute of Policy Studies

4.15 pm – 6.00 pm

Session One War & Wealth

Opening the conference, this session discusses events and developments in the global context of trade and the rise and fall of world powers. It will provide an overview of how ancient maritime and land routes linking East and West evolved over the centuries, and Singapore's role as a maritime city and trading hub, and also its position at the crossroads of the tussle for geopolitical power. It will discuss how globalisation has manifested through the centuries via physical connections such as the Silk Road. It will also explore the expansion and retrenchment of regional and global powers through the ages and seek to gauge how Singapore can remain a relevant trading hub, deeper into the 21st century.

The session will address the following questions: What catalysed the formation of trade routes linking Europe and Asia? How did it facilitate the spread of goods, people and ideas? What were the factors that encouraged the formation of hubs for trading, goods transport and political power? How were empires and cities impacted by shifting trade routes, conflict and new ideologies? How did city-states play a role in trade and how did they manage their relations with major powers? What was Southeast Asia's historical role as an important node in maritime trade routes? Why did maritime routes supersede the Silk Road in linking East and West? How have trade routes been affected by great power rivalries through the centuries? What role did old connections and common heritage play in forging and maintaining new trade routes? Looking ahead, does the rise of Asia mean stagnation and decline in the West?

It will also examine the context closer to home: How has Singapore's identity as a maritime hub and sovereign city-state evolved over time? How important has Singapore's foreign policy been in safeguarding its position as a crucial trading hub? What key lessons has Singapore learnt in handling relations with great powers in the 20th century? How can Singapore leverage its historical ties with India, China and Southeast Asian neighbours to tackle 21st-century political and economic challenges? Is there still a

place for a city-state like Singapore, as the rest of Asia catches up in development? How can Singapore benefit from China's One Belt One Road initiative and other attempts to create chains of economic value across the globe? What worldview and strategic capabilities must Singaporeans possess to remain globally competitive and maintain strong diplomatic ties across the world?

Chairperson

Professor Danny Quah
Dean and Li Ka Shing Professor in Economics
Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy

Speakers

Professor Peter Frankopan
Professor of Global History
Worcester College
University of Oxford

Associate Professor Peter Borschberg
Department of History
Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences
National University of Singapore

Question-and-Answer Session

6.00 pm – 6.30 pm

Cocktails

6.30 pm – 6.45 pm

Welcome Remarks

Professor Tan Eng Chye
President
National University of Singapore

6.45 pm – 7.45 pm

Dinner

7.45 pm – 8.45 pm

Dialogue with Mr Heng Swee Keat, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance

Chairperson

Ambassador Chan Heng Chee
Ambassador-at-Large
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
and
Chairman
Lee Kuan Yew Centre for Innovative Cities
Singapore University of Technology and Design

Question-and-Answer Session

8.45 pm

End

TUESDAY, 1 OCTOBER 2019

7.45 am – 8.30 am

Registration

8.30 am – 10.15 am

**Session Two
Separations & Connections**

Following the opening session's more global perspective, this session hones in more tightly onto the region to discuss events and developments in the recorded history of Singapore and Southeast Asia along the themes of separation and connections. Experts will explore social, political and cultural developments in the region at the onset of colonialism, and also discuss the effects of Singapore's separation from the surrounding region and its connections to the British Empire and beyond.

The session will address the following questions: What was the immediate region like before Raffles arrived in 1819? What were the existing forms of community identity among the various ethnicities in the region? How did such ties exist between rural areas and cities as well as extend across island chains and seas? How were trade and political relations in the region at the onset of colonisation, and what was the importance of maritime trade to local communities? What were the effects of early Dutch and Portuguese influence on regional states and how did they adapt to colonial incursions?

On a more local level, the session will analyse: How did British colonialism separate Singapore from the Malay world and re-connect it to the region and the world on different terms as a British colony? What was Singapore's role in the British Empire? How much did the British influence the nature of the community, and what public policies did they introduce to the colony? What other networks was Singapore a part of? What role did the Japanese envision for Singapore during the Occupation? What did the British intend for Singapore when they returned? Why was the Founding Fathers' first strategic decision to achieve independence defined by re-connecting with Malaya via merger? What is the impact of this long legacy of connection with and separation from the Malay world on Singapore's relations with its two closest neighbours, and its role in ASEAN?

Given the discussion of recurring separations and connections that played out in Singapore's history, the session will offer a sense of the profound impact colonialism had on the region's geopolitical, political, social and cultural development.

Chairperson

Adjunct Associate Professor (Honorary) Kwa Chong Guan
Department of History
Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences
National University of Singapore

Speakers

Professor Wang Gungwu
University Professor
National University of Singapore

Professor Leonard Andaya
Professor of Southeast Asian History
Department of History
University of Hawai'i

Question-and-Answer Session

10.15 am – 10.45 am

Tea Break

10.45 am – 12.30 pm

Session Three Contestation & Choices

This session provides an overview of the decolonisation process in the post-war world. It sets out the specific circumstances under which post-colonial Singapore came to have its current governance, political, social and economic models of operation.

The session will address the following questions: What events and forces set in motion mass decolonisation across colonial empires after the Second World War? How did the decolonisation process differ in various nations (e.g., conflict, negotiated independence or incomplete decolonisation)? What kinds of challenges did the new national leaders grapple with? What role did Cold War rivalries play in decolonisation and in the development of newly independent states? How did the so-called Third World respond to the appeal and power of capitalism and socialism? When are new nations truly “decolonised” or do they merely become newly subjugated in a different form by ideological struggles? In what ways do the echoes of colonisation reverberate in today’s world? What would a truly “decolonised” state look like and does Singapore qualify?

Closer to home, the session will discuss: What were the specific choices that were thrust upon or made by the political actors during the decolonisation process and upon independence in 1965? What were the determinants of geography and external developments (e.g., the British withdrawal, the Cold War, the opening up of China and so on) that shaped their thinking? What were the political ideas and ideals that held sway at the time? How did the PAP adapt its early socialist-oriented policies (particularly its roots in trade unionism) in order to grow the economy? How did Singapore develop a governance model that was based on one-party dominance rather than highly competitive multiparty politics? As we look ahead, what lessons can we draw from history as divergent political and socio-economic interests emerge — a trend seen in several developed democracies — to suggest that changes will be needed in our models of governance?

Given the increasing diversity of opinions, contestation of ideas, and strategic choices that are needed in planning the future of Singapore, this session will provide an insight into how such challenges were faced in the past and the various factors and pressures that weigh heavily on decision-makers and citizens in the large political transitions in the life of their nations.

Chairperson

Mr Ho Kwon Ping
Executive Chairman
Banyan Tree Holdings Limited

Speakers

Professor Gyan Prakash
Dayton-Stockton Professor of History
Department of History
Princeton University

Professor Tan Tai Yong
President
Yale-NUS College

Question-and-Answer Session

12.30 pm – 1.30 pm

Lunch

1.30 pm – 3.15 pm

Session Four Diversity & Identity

The session will focus on how Singapore's population has always comprised, in large part, immigrants in search of a better future. How did Singapore attract hungry, enterprising and adventurous talent from the Malay world, China, India, the Middle East and Europe, who brought along their work ethic, pioneering spirit, capital, ideas, culture and notions of leadership? How did this *mélange* congregate and operate before and after 1819? How did the British manage this diversity, if at all, and what were the positive and negative aspects that the Singapore government inherited in 1965, such as race categorisation? What was the impact of this unique mix of population on Singapore's relations with its neighbours, and powers further afield, e.g., China, Japan and India?

The government's proactive policies to build social harmony and unity-in-diversity worked particularly well in our nation-building years, and Singapore's brand of multiracialism and multiculturalism has often impressed visitors. The speakers will discuss whether we can assume that the relatively high level of social cohesion can be maintained, especially given the challenges that the rising tide of tribalism, populism and cynicism in the regional and global environment as well as large people flows of temporary and permanent migrants can bring. What are the other internally-generated drivers of change that will affect our social cohesion? What are the

external challenges ahead, with the push for further economic integration in ASEAN, rise of China and India, and transnational movements based on religion?

Will our diversity be a strength or weakness; will it bond or splinter us as we look ahead? The discussion should suggest specific links to the past and the bonds among us that can help national leaders as well as citizens respond to those challenges.

Chairperson

Professor Vineeta Sinha
Head
Department of Sociology
Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences
National University of Singapore

Speakers

Associate Professor Farish Ahmad-Noor
Coordinator of PhD Programme
S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies

Professor Brenda Yeoh
Raffles Professor of Social Sciences
Department of Geography
Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences
National University of Singapore

Question-and-Answer Session

3.15 pm – 3.45 pm

Tea Break

3.45 pm – 5.30 pm

Session Five Fighters & Builders

Previous sessions would have raised discussions on the directions Singapore's public policy has to take, both in light of the defining moments in its history as well as broader geo-strategic developments.

This final session seeks to tease out and elaborate on these impending challenges that Singapore — a small city-state and “little red dot” — has to overcome as it endeavours not to be dislodged from its place in the global hierarchies and structures. Drawing on relevant lessons from the past including the legacy of British colonialism in public policy, the legal and governance systems, the session will aim to propose how these can help the present generation tackle current and future challenges. It will provide perspectives on the economic and social challenges of globalisation that might shape Singapore going forward.

More critically, the session will discuss the qualities of leadership and systems of governance that will be needed to shape our national future. This can be in the area of instituting and maintaining the rule of law and good governance; in

catlysing inclusive and equitable economic growth; and in creating regional and global governance architecture so that the small city-state that Singapore is can prosper in a complex, diverse region that continues to be at the junction of the ebb and flow of geopolitical and economic power. Will Singaporeans always need to fight to be different or should we go with the flow and ride the tide as each generation recommits itself to building a strong, sovereign nation for those who follow?

Chairperson

Mr Warren Fernandez
Editor-in-Chief
The Straits Times
Singapore Press Holdings Ltd

Speakers

Professor Tommy Koh
Faculty of Law
National University of Singapore
and
Ambassador-at-Large
Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Mr John Micklethwait
Editor-in-Chief
Bloomberg News

Question-and-Answer Session

5.30 pm – 5.40 pm

Closing Remarks

Mr Janadas Devan

5.40 pm

End

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Last modified on 9 September 2019