

## Question on China taking a leaf from S'pore's book sparks debate

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A question on the relationship between China and Singapore sparked debate at the Singapore Bicentennial Conference yesterday.

Institute of Policy Studies deputy director for research Gillian Koh had pointed to a New York Times opinion piece on China, which argued one reason for the longevity of the Chinese Communist Party's regime is that it has taken a leaf from the book of how Singapore is governed.

Professor Tommy Koh, an ambassador-at-large, said this comparison is inappropriate as there are fundamental differences in the political systems of both countries.

Unlike Chinese citizens, Singaporeans enjoy universal suffrage and many political parties are allowed to contest for power in regular elections, he said on a panel moderated by Mr Warren Fernandez, editor of The Straits Times and editor-in-chief of Singapore Press Holdings' English/Malay/ Tamil Media Group.

"I would never dream of comparing China with Singapore because they are so incredibly different," responded Mr John Micklethwait, Bloomberg News editor-in-chief. "But I do think it is fair to say that China could learn from Singapore about government, and I think, used to quite a lot." He added that the level at which China seems to be drawing lessons from Singapore seems to have declined slightly.

"Singapore is too small and too unique to be a model for China; for anybody else," Prof Koh responded, adding that it is not true that interactions between both countries have become less intense. Instead, both sides learn from each other today, he said.

Added Mr Micklethwait: "Five years ago, when I went to China, there was much more talk about Singapore being something that people were following."

Both gave their views on how US-China relations, which have become strained since Mr Donald Trump's election as United States President, could pan out.

"I am a natural-born optimist, but on US-China relations, I am pessimistic," Prof Koh said. "I fear that as this rivalry becomes more intense and more acrimonious, each side will not accept neutrality and will expect us to take sides. I hope that evil day will never come."

He and Mr Micklethwait agreed that China's rise goes beyond trade or technology disputes, but poses a more fundamental threat to America's position in the global order.

The current contest between both countries is a very long-term one, Mr Micklethwait added.

"I think the biggest mistake the Chinese made was imagining this was somehow just Trump," he said. "In America, they feel the dragon's breath on their shoulders."