
FOREWORD

Prior to the Second World War, the states that shaped the international system were few in number and had evolved over long periods of time. For a century and a half, they had been limited to the North Atlantic. Their institutions had evolved over centuries of domestic controversies and been tested by many international conflicts. When the reach of the traditional European powers was suddenly truncated by the costs and upheavals of the war, the United States and the Soviet Union found themselves in a contest over the balance of power—now no longer Continental, but global—and the shape of the international system.

Into this new world emerged scores of states out of formerly colonial rule. No blueprint existed to define their domestic structures or their international roles. These new states were obliged to undertake, in a matter of decades, the task that, in Europe, unfolded over centuries. They had to simultaneously create a domestic structure and state apparatus appropriate to their challenges; build a sense of national identity strong enough to withstand ideological pressures but sufficiently inclusive for multi-ethnic populations; relate the new state to the global economy; establish a basis for its security; and, on that basis, play a role in the international order.

Adding to the complexity of the challenge, these new actors needed to accomplish their emergence as sovereign states in a world where, for the first time in human history, all the continents were in a position to interact with each other. Policy had become global, especially in the economic field. Ideological disputes were conducted on a worldwide stage. At the same time, communication became near-instantaneous, so that policymaking could be observed in real time by a global public. Nation-building, already complex, became a daunting enterprise whose success was not foreordained.

No new state met these challenges more effectively and imaginatively than Singapore. As the main British naval base in the Far East, it had neither prospect nor aspiration for nationhood until the collapse of European and Japanese power in the aftermath of the Second World War redrew the political map of Southeast Asia. In the first wave of decolonisation, Singapore was incorporated into Malaya (now Malaysia). But its largely Chinese population proved too indigestible for a state attempting to define its national identity via its Malay majority. Malaya extruded Singapore because it was not yet ready to cope with so large a Chinese population or, less charitably, to teach Singapore the habits of dependence when it was forced back—as was confidently expected—into what later became the Malaysian Federation.

Circumstances could not have been more daunting. Located on a sandbar with no natural resources, Singapore had in the 1950s a polyglot population of slightly over a million (today close to 5 million), of which 75.4% was Chinese, 13.6% Malay and 8.6% Indian. No one had previously considered Singaporeans as a nation: They were the residents of a colonial port city, many of them recent immigrants whose only common ‘national’ experience was foreign rule. In the south, Singapore was bordered by Indonesia, with a population of over 100 million (now more than double that) and, in the north, by Malaya, with a population of roughly 7 million (now over 28 million). The region, as well as China to its north, was then riven by conflicts and revolutionary violence. By far the smallest country in Southeast Asia, Singapore seemed destined to become a client state of more powerful neighbours, if indeed it could preserve its independence at all.

But history shows that normally prudent, ordinary calculations can be overturned by extraordinary personalities. Lee Kuan Yew, initially a proponent of a union with Malaya, seized the challenge of independence and led his polyglot population into an effort of a scale and sweep few outside observers would have thought possible. He turned the absence of national resources into an asset by defining Singapore’s comparative advantage as intellectual excellence and superior performance. He laid the groundwork for a civil service of extraordinary ability and incorruptibility, insisting on careful selection and strict merit-based promotion. He exhorted Singaporeans to consider themselves not only a distinct nation, but one capable of greatness.

In this way, Singapore formed a consensus based on national achievement, and emerged not only as an independent state but as a regional and global hub. It became an intellectual focal point for surrounding countries—the high-tech leader of Southeast Asia, the scientific centre and the commercial entrepôt. Annual per capita income grew from less than \$1,000 at the time of independence to over \$40,000 today. Every Singaporean now has a claim to partly subsidized public housing and to adequate medical care.

At the same time, Singapore achieved an international position and an influence far outstripping its size. It came to play a major role in the politics and economics of Southeast Asia, while establishing close ties with all the major countries affecting the region—including close and cooperative relations with both China and the United States.

Lee Kuan Yew shaped this evolution and contributed crucially to its success. As the papers collected in these volumes show, Lee charted Singapore’s course in the early days of its existence as an autonomous political entity, and has guided it through decades of regional political and economic upheaval. He staked out a political structure and national identity for Singapore, then defended it tenaciously and eloquently against challenge—both from critics on the ideological left who assailed Singapore’s path as capitalist and pro-Western, and from critics in the West who criticized Lee’s model as an insufficiently close approximation of Western institutions.

Readers of these volumes will form their own views of Singapore's political necessities, particularly during its formative period. Yet none can deny Lee's achievement. No modern leader more deserves the appellation of father of his country than Singapore's first premier and its guiding spirit ever since.

It is the task of a leader to take his society from where it is to where it has never been. To enter unfamiliar territory implies that the course is uncertain: Courage is required to persist in the face of inevitable doubts and setbacks. On that road, judgement is required about the ambiguities of choice and about what a society can, in fact, sustain. A leader who sticks too closely to the familiar invites stagnation; if he goes beyond the limits of his society's tolerance, he risks shipwreck. A great leader operates at the outer edge of his state's capacity, challenging his people to heights they did not know were within reach.

Leadership needs to generate the answers to four questions: What are the goals of the society? What does it seek to prevent? What are the costs of various options? How is the country to pay the price for them? These issues must not only be correctly defined, but also the answers must be given while there still remains scope for creative action. The difference between an academic and a statesman is that the political leader must always act under the pressure of time and that his actions tend to be irrevocable. The most difficult task of statesmanship is thus to translate concept into practice through a series of stages of meticulous performance.

I have had the privilege of meeting many of the world's leaders over the past forty years. None has shown greater insight, imagination and creativity than Lee Kuan Yew.

In no field is this truer than in foreign policy. Whenever Lee Kuan Yew appears in a foreign capital, he has access to all the top officials. It is not because of the force that Singapore wields or the policy choices Lee is able to impose on his interlocutors. It is because his analysis is of such quality and depth that his counterparts consider meeting with him as a way to educate themselves.

The volumes presented here show how Lee Kuan Yew has achieved his eminence. Containing ten volumes of speeches, press conferences and observations over a period of forty years, they are an indispensable source for the thinking of one of the seminal leaders of our period. They show a statesman of rare skill navigating difficult choices as his state secured its independence, built its distinct identity, navigated domestic and regional upheavals, and emerged as a crucial and influential component of the modern world order.

Henry A. Kissinger

2 August 2011

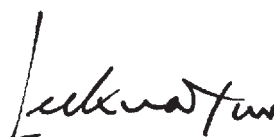


NOTE FROM MR. LEE KUAN YEW

My Press Secretary, Mdm Yeong Yoon Ying, proposed the publication of all important speeches I have made from 1950. I was persuaded that it would be a useful reference book. 1950 was the year I returned from England, after being away four years: three years at Cambridge and one year in London.

I did not realise that (for the period 1950 to 1990) it would cover 10 volumes. This is not a book for light reading but a record of what I have said or written.

The second series will cover the period from 1990 to 2011.



Lee Kuan Yew
Singapore
21 June 2011



PREFACE

The Papers of Lee Kuan Yew: Speeches, Interviews and Dialogues is intended for scholars and readers who are interested in having a deeper insight into the thoughts and views of Singapore's founding Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew on issues concerning the island nation, as well as the larger world.

Although many books have been written about Lee, *The Papers of Lee Kuan Yew* sets itself apart by presenting a valuable and comprehensive compilation of Lee's speeches, interviews, commentaries and dialogues with both Singapore and international media, over his long and illustrious political career. The content is mainly drawn from the collections of the National Archives of Singapore, as well as materials deposited with various agencies including the Prime Minister's Office, former Singapore Broadcasting Corporation, Office of the Press Secretary to Mr. Lee Kuan Yew and the Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts.

This project covers the period 1950–1990 and is presented chronologically—starting with Lee's earliest speech given in January 1950 during a talk given to the Malayan Forum in London and ending with three separate press interviews he gave on 26 November 1990 to a group of Indonesian journalists, the British Broadcasting Corporation and the Business Breakfast Programme. These were the last interviews Lee gave before stepping down as Prime Minister on 28 November 1990. It is important that when reading these speeches and interviews, readers need to contextualise the views of Lee within the political, social and economic milieu of the particular period in which they were expressed.

Minor edits have been made to some of the transcripts, especially those of interviews and dialogues from the early years, as parts of the audio recordings are inaudible or no longer available for cross-referencing. Annotations have been made about selected terms and names of some speeches or interviews. This is to furnish context and more background information to readers who may not be familiar with certain content that is mainly unique to Singapore and Southeast Asia. In addition, historical photographs have been carefully selected and inserted to give readers a sense of time and place and have been credited following the captions. A selected bibliography and a comprehensive index appear at the end of each volume.

■ PREFACE

The content has been compiled by a team from the National Archives of Singapore who worked closely with the Office of the Press Secretary to Mr. Lee Kuan Yew and Cengage Learning Asia. It has also been overseen by a distinguished advisory board. Our heartfelt thanks also go out to Dr. Henry Kissinger, former Secretary of State of the United States of America, for his foreword. It is hoped that *The Papers of Lee Kuan Yew* will be able to give readers a better understanding of Lee's role in the founding and development of modern Singapore.

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