

HH2001
Singapore: The Making of a Cosmopolitan City-State
Semester 2 (AY2024/25)

Seminar: Tuesday, 3:30 p.m. to 6:20 p.m.
Venue: LHS-TR+56, LHS-03-02, The Hive

Instructor: Asst. Prof. Michael Yeo
Email: m.yeo@ntu.edu.sg
Office: SHHK #05-20
Office Hours: By appointment; email me to arrange for a consultation if required.

Course Outline

This course is about the emergence of Singapore as a city-state, framed in its regional and global contexts. It will discuss the various factors—cultural, geographical, institutional, international, and socio-political—that shaped the trajectory of the island’s history, mainly focusing on the twentieth century. We will examine Singapore’s oft-vaunted development through its colonial legacies, multi-ethnic mosaic, and regional relationships. The interplay of these elements precipitated the rise and challenges of a cosmopolitan city-state still grappling with its national identity.

Learning Goals

By the end of this course, you should be able to:

1. Analyse and explain key processes, forces, and individuals that shaped contemporary Singapore.
2. Interpret historical events in Singapore’s history since 1400 from a regional and global perspective.
3. Demonstrate how history influences debates and discussions about national identity in Singapore.

Class Structure

Seminars will be carried out in person and will take place on Tuesdays, from 3:30 p.m. to 6:20 p.m., interspersed with short breaks. You will be assigned a group at the beginning of the first class, which you will have to sit with for the rest of the semester. On some weeks, you might visit museums in Singapore either alone or with your groupmates.

Course Assessment

You will be assessed according to the following criteria:

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| Class Participation: | 10% |
| Group Presentation: | 10% |
| Major Essay Proposal (26 February): | 20% |
| Museum Visit Essay (17 March): | 20% |
| Major Essay (24 April): | 40% |

Class Participation

You are required to attend every seminar, having read all the assigned weekly readings to the extent that you are prepared to discuss them. Your participation in class will be assessed by the depth, frequency, and quality of your contributions to tutorial discussions.

Group Presentation

With your groupmates, you will give a presentation during one of the seminars (either on Weeks 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, or 12). The group presentation involves each group member introducing an event they consider significant in the history of Singapore, which we will use to create our own timeline of Singapore's history. Please refer to the question for each weekly seminar, which can be found in the class schedule. The group presentation should also: (1) allow for each group member to speak for five minutes; and (2) include a question-and-answer session. Do note that your presentation skills will be assessed individually, so the scores of each group member might not be uniform.

Major Essay Proposal

You will write a 1,000-word proposal for your Major Essay. The Major Essay Proposal should consist of an essay question, a preliminary argument, and an annotated bibliography. The purpose of this assignment is to help you to develop a question and to analyze a small selection of sources for your Major Essay. This assignment will be due by 11:59 pm on 26 February 2025 on NTU Learn. You can find detailed instructions for this assignment on NTU Learn.

Museum Visit Essay

You will write a 1,000-word essay based on your visit to a museum exhibit on Week 6. Your essay should draw upon relevant secondary sources from the weekly readings. This assignment will be due by 11:59 pm on 17 March 2025 on NTU Learn. You can find detailed instructions for this assignment on NTU Learn.

Major Essay

You will write a 2,000-word essay on any aspect of Singapore's history of your choice. Your essay should ideally be based on your Major Essay Proposal, with some revisions based on feedback, but it does not have to be. It must draw upon both primary and secondary sources that are relevant and properly cited. The Major Essay should present a clear research question and a persuasive central argument. This assignment will be due by 11:59 pm on 24 April 2025 on NTU Learn. You can find detailed instructions for this assignment on NTU Learn.

Class Schedule and Readings

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Week 1 (14 January)

Course Introduction

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Week 2 (21 January)

Approaches to Singapore History

Readings:

- Hong Lysa and Huang Jianli, *The Scripting of a National History: Singapore and Its Pasts* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2008), 1–29. [These pages refer to the chapters titled, “Introduction: Beginning of History” and “New Testament: Singapore and Its Tensed Pasts”.]
- Karl Hack, “Framing Singapore’s History,” in *Studying Singapore’s Past: C.M. Turnbull and the History of Modern Singapore*, ed. Nicholas Tarling (Singapore: NUS Press, 2012), 17–64.

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Week 3 (28 January)

TBC

Readings:

- TBC
- TBC

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Week 4 (4 February)

Singapore Before 1819: Place, Region, and World

Readings:

- Peter Borschberg, *The Singapore and Melaka Straits: Violence, Security and Diplomacy in the 17th Century* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2010), 17–59. [These pages refer to the chapter titled, “Landscapes, Seascapes and Imagination at the Southern Tip of the Malay Peninsula”.]
- Kwa Chong Guan, “Locating Singapore on the Maritime Silk Road: Evidence from Maritime Archaeology, Ninth to Early Nineteenth Centuries,” Nalanda-Srivijaya Centre Working Paper Series No. 10, January 2012.

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Week 5 (11 February)

Entrepôt and Empire

Readings:

- C.M. Turnbull, *A History of Singapore, 1819–2005*, 3rd ed. (Singapore: NUS Press, 2009), 83–145. [These pages refer to the chapter titled, “This Spirited and Splendid Little Colony”.]

- W.G. Huff, *The Economic Growth of Singapore: Trade and Development in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 7–42. [These pages refer to the chapter titled, “Patterns in the Economic Development of Singapore, 1870–1990”.]

In-Class Group Presentation:

In your view, what are five or six pivotal events in Singapore’s history from 1822 to 1942?

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Week 6 (18 February)

Urbanization and the Environment

Readings:

- Brenda Yeoh, *Contesting Space in Colonial Singapore: Power Relations and the Urban Built Environment* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2003), 28–77. [These pages refer to the chapter titled, “Establishing an Institution of Control over the Urban Built Environment: The Municipal Authority of Singapore, 1819–1930”.]
- Miles Powell, “People in Peril, Environments at Risk: Coolies, Tigers and Singapore’s Ecology of Poverty,” *Environment and History* 22, no. 3 (2016): 455–482.

In-Class Group Presentation:

In your view, what are five or six historical events or factors that shaped attitudes in Singapore towards land use or the environment?

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Week 7 (25 February)

Race and Ethnicity from Colony to Country

Readings:

- Charles Hirschman, “The Making of Race in Colonial Malaya: Political Economy and Racial Ideology,” *Sociological Forum* 1, no. 2 (1986): 330–361.
- Anthony Milner, “Singapore’s Role in Constituting the Malay Narrative,” in *Studying Singapore’s Past: C.M. Turnbull and the History of Modern Singapore*, ed. Nicholas Tarling (Singapore: NUS Press, 2012), 125–45.
- Chua Beng Huat, *Liberalism Disavowed: Communitarianism and State Capitalism in Singapore* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2017), 123–156. [These pages refer to the chapter titled, “Governing Race: State Multiracialism and Social Stability”.]

In-Class Group Presentation:

In your view, what are five or six historical events or factors that shaped attitudes in Singapore towards race and ethnicity?

Term Break

3 to 7 March

Week 8 (11 March)

Museum Visit

There will be no seminar this week, but you will visit, at a time of your choice, one of the following exhibitions:

- *Siapa Nama Kamu? Art in Singapore since the 19th Century* [National Gallery Singapore]
- “Singapura (1299–1818)” in the *Singapore History Gallery* [National Museum of Singapore]
- “Crown Colony (1819–1941)” in the *Singapore History Gallery* [National Museum of Singapore]
- “Syonan-To (1942–1945)” in the *Singapore History Gallery* [National Museum of Singapore]
- “Singapore (1945–present)” in the *Singapore History Gallery* [National Museum of Singapore]
- *Surviving the Japanese Occupation: War and Its Legacies* [Former Ford Factory]

During this visit, you should take notes on your impressions of the exhibition with the following questions in mind:

- What is the narrative presented in the exhibition, and how does it contribute or challenge the national historical narrative?
- What artifacts and artworks are used in the exhibition, and to what effect?
- What are the strengths, limitations, and possibilities of the exhibition?
- How does the exhibition relate to one or more of the weekly topics of the course?

After your visit, please submit your Museum Visit Essay, critiquing the exhibition and how it approaches Singapore’s history, by 17 March 2025. You can find detailed instructions for this assignment on NTU Learn. Please note that you may choose to visit the exhibition alone or with your classmates, though you will have to submit this assignment individually.

Week 9 (18 March)

Building a Nation

Readings:

- Sunil S. Amrith, “Internationalism and Political Pluralism in Singapore, 1950–1963,” in *Paths Not Taken: Political Pluralism in Post-War Singapore*, ed. Michael D. Barr and Carl A. Trocki (Singapore: NUS Press, 2008), 37–56.
- W.G. Huff, *The Economic Growth of Singapore: Trade and Development in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 299–360. [These pages refer to the chapter titled, “Markets, Government and Growth, 1960–1990”.]
- Bernard Fook Weng Loo, “Goh Keng Swee and the Emergence of a Modern SAF: The Rearing of a Poisonous Shrimp,” in *Goh Keng Swee: A Legacy of Public Service*, ed. Emrys Chew and Chong Guan Kwa (Singapore: World Scientific, 2012), 127–182.

In-Class Group Presentation:

In your view, what five or six pivotal events shaped Singapore’s economy and military from 1965 to the present?

Week 10 (25 March)

Globalization, Regionalism, and “Asian Values”

Readings:

- S. Rajaratnam, “ASEAN: The Way Ahead,” in *The ASEAN Reader*, comp. K.S. Sandhu, Sharon Siddique, Chandran Jeshurun, Ananda Rajah, Joseph L.H. Tan, Pushpa Thambipillai (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1992), xxiii–xxvi.
- Ang Cheng Guan, “The Global and the Regional in Lee Kuan Yew’s Strategic Thought: The Early Cold War Years,” in *Singapore in Global History*, ed. Derek Heng and Syed Muhd Khairudin Aljunied (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2011), 235–267.
- Mark Thompson, “Whatever Happened to Asian Values?” *Journal of Democracy* 12, no. 4 (2001): 154–65.

In-Class Group Presentation:

In your view, what five or six pivotal events shaped Singapore’s international outlook from 1965 to the present?

Week 11 (1 April)

Life on the Margins of a Cosmopolitan City-State

Readings:

- James Francis Warren, “Japanese Brothel Prostitution, Daily Life, and the Client: Colonial Singapore, 1870–1940,” in *Sex, Power, and Slavery*, ed. Gwyn Campbell and Elizabeth Elbourne (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2014), 291–318.
- Noorashikin Abdul Rahman, “Managing Labour Flows: Foreign Talent, Foreign Workers and Domestic Help,” in *Management of Success: Singapore Revisited*, ed. Terence Chong (Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2010), 199–216.
- Russell Heng Hiang Khng, “Tiptoe Out of the Closet: The Before and After of the Increasingly Visible Gay Community in Singapore,” *Journal of Homosexuality* 40, no. 3/4 (2001): 81–97.

In-Class Group Presentation:

Consider the timeline of Singapore’s history that we assembled over this semester. In your view, what four or five events that affected marginalized communities are missing from this timeline?

Week 12 (8 April)

Colonial Legacies

Readings:

- Sai Siew Min, “Why Raffles is Still Standing: Colonialism, Migration and Singapore’s Scripting of the Present,” in *Raffles Renounced: Towards a Merdeka History*, ed. Alfian Sa’at, Faris Joraimi, and Sai Siew Min (Singapore: Ethos Books, 2021), 145–167.

In-Class Group Presentation:

In your view, what are five or six historical events or factors that shaped attitudes in Singapore towards colonialism and its legacies?

Week 13 (15 April)

Writing Week

There will be no seminar this week, please take this time to work on your Major Essay. If required, please send any queries to the instructor via email.

PROVISIONAL

Course Policies and Student Responsibilities

General

You are responsible for familiarizing yourself with the information in this document, especially assignment deadlines and requirements. You are also responsible for finding out about any course-related announcements if you miss any seminars. You are expected to complete all pre-class readings, attend all seminars punctually, and participate in all tutorial discussions. You should adhere to accepted scholarly practices in all of your written work; any source material used should be properly cited.

Absenteeism

This course requires you to be in class to contribute to discussions and team presentations. These in-class activities make up a significant portion of your course grade. Absence from class without a valid reason will thus affect your overall course grade. Valid reasons include: falling ill, which must be supported by a medical certificate; or participating in an NTU-approved activity, which must be supported by an excuse letter from a relevant body; or a serious extenuating circumstance, which should be supported by documentation. There will be no make-up opportunities for group presentations. If you miss a seminar, you must inform the instructor before the start of the seminar by email.

Late Policy

Assignments submitted after their assigned deadlines will be penalised by the deduction of 5% of the maximum score for each 24-hour period after the submission date. For example, assignments submitted 2 hours late will be subject to a 5% penalty, assignments submitted 26 hours late will be subject to a 10% penalty, and so on. If you require an extension, please request for it at least a day before the assignment is due with a valid reason. Valid reasons include: falling ill, which must be supported by a medical certificate; participating in an NTU-approved activity, which must be supported by an excuse letter from a relevant body; a serious extenuating circumstance, which should be supported by relevant documentation; or any personal reasons that might be conveyed in confidence to the instructor.

Cheating and Plagiarism

Universities consider using the works of others without properly acknowledging that use to be “cheating”; this includes contract cheating or injudicious use of artificial intelligence (AI). What counts as “injudicious use” largely refers, but is not limited, to using AI to write entire chunks of your work. Egregious cases of such behaviour will result in a score of zero for the assignment in question. In accordance with school policy, the instructor will also report such cases to the university to be placed on record in your academic file. Learn how to cite the work of others properly. If in doubt, ask.

Word Limits

All assignments have clearly stated word limits and instructions on what is included in the word count. Please adhere to this word limit. If your assignment exceeds the maximum word limit by 10%, it will be penalised by the deduction of 10% of the maximum score. If your assignment exceeds the maximum word limit by 15%, it will incur further penalties.

Course Style Guide

Please cite your sources according to the notes and bibliography system of the Chicago Manual of Style. For all assignments, please select an easily readable font, such as Times New Roman or Garamond, and refrain from using Arial or Helvetica. The main body of the text should be in font size 12pt, and the footnotes should be in font size 10pt. The main body of the text should be in double spacing, with footnotes in single spacing.