

# Choosing What to Remember in Neoliberal Singapore: The Singapore Story, State Censorship and State-Sponsored Nostalgia

Kenneth Paul Tan

National University of Singapore

## ABSTRACT

This article interrogates the persistence of heavy-handed censorship of political films in Singapore at a time of cultural liberalisation when the state has generally shown greater tolerance for alternative political expression in theatre, the literary arts, academia and public events. Part of this has to do with the focus of these films on political dissidents and their greater capacity to present a fundamental challenge to The Singapore Story, which is the regime-legitimising official account of Singapore's history. It also has to do with the power and outreach of relatively low-budget independent films and the documentary genre in particular to evoke alternative histories vividly, give voice to the silenced, and channel these voices digitally into the collective cinematic and social media experience of the present. With the jubilee celebrations of 2015, the ruling party has been working hard to regain hegemony after experiencing its worst electoral losses in the 2011 general elections. Its main approach for achieving this has been to sponsor widespread national nostalgia coupled with highly selective censorship of political films that challenge the dominant official discourse in ways that can erode the government's electoral dominance and political authority.

## KEYWORDS

Tan Pin Pin; Martyn See; neoliberal global city; creative economy; film censorship; Singapore politics; The Singapore Story; nostalgia

## Political Films and the Films Act

In 2002, three film lecturers in Singapore withdrew their 15-minute documentary film *Vision of Persistence* from being screened at the Singapore International Film Festival (Agence France Presse, 2002). Offering written apologies, the filmmakers feared that their film on uncompromisingly outspoken opposition politician, the late J. B. Jeyaretnam, had contravened Singapore's Films Act (Chapter 107), which made it a crime to make, reproduce, import, distribute and exhibit "party political films" (Section 33). In this category, the law included films or videos in any format that it deemed "an advertisement made by or on behalf of any political party in Singapore or anybody whose objects relate wholly or mainly to politics in Singapore, or any branch of such party or body", or those that were "made by

any person and directed towards any political end in Singapore” (Section 2). Those found guilty could be fined up to S\$100,000 or imprisoned for up to two years.

Three years later, in 2005, *Singapore Rebel*, another short documentary film featuring a political dissident, was banned under the Films Act for being a party political film. Produced and directed by Martyn See, the film featured an extended interview with another opposition politician, Chee Soon Juan. Then, in 2007, the authorities banned a second short documentary film by See, *Zahari's 17 Years*, about a political dissident, Said Zahari, who had been arrested in a massive “anti-communist” security operation in 1963 known as Operation Coldstore. More than 100 left-wing activists were detained, including members of the Barisan Sosialis, a party that rivalled the ruling People’s Action Party. In an official statement, the authorities explained that the film gave a:

distorted and misleading portrayal of Said Zahari’s arrest and detention under the Internal Security Act in 1963 and is an attempt to exculpate himself from his past involvement in communist united front activities against the interest of Singapore. The government will not allow people who had posed a security threat to the country in the past, to exploit the use of the film to purvey a false and distorted portrayal of their past actions and detention by the government. This could undermine public confidence in the government. (quoted in Kobayashi, 2012, p. 179)

The Films Act gave the minister discretionary powers to ban films that he deemed contrary to the public interest (Section 35). However, the Act was amended in 2009 to exclude from the party political films classification any documentary film that was “without any animation and composed wholly of an accurate account depicting actual events, persons (deceased or otherwise) or situations, but not a film (i) wholly or substantially based on unscripted or ‘reality’ type programmes; or (ii) that depicts those events, persons or situations in a dramatic way” (Section 2c). In the same year, the ban on *Singapore Rebel* was lifted, prompting some observers to ask if these were “signs of a more relaxed political space” (Teo, 2009).

In September 2014, five years later, Singapore’s Media Development Authority (MDA) rejected for public screening and distribution a documentary directed and produced by internationally acclaimed Singaporean filmmaker Tan Pin Pin. Describing *To Singapore, With Love* as distorted, untruthful and a threat to national security, the state regulatory authority classified the film as “Not Allowed for All Ratings” (NAR). It took issue with what it viewed as the documentary’s one-sided portrayal of Singapore’s political exiles as innocent victims when, according to the official narrative of Singapore’s history, “The Singapore Story”, they had been members or at least supporters of the outlawed Communist Party of Malaya (CPM). Members of the political establishment, including no less than the prime minister himself, stood behind MDA’s decision and publicly offered their own views about the historical truth and the danger of films that, unlike dry factual argumentation, had the power to mislead audiences with emotive or sensationalist untruths. Tan’s film, they claimed, whitewashed over the less-than-innocent past motivations and actions of these exiles, a number of whom had been away from Singapore for half a century (Mokhtar, 11 September 2014). The following month, Tan re-submitted the same version of *To Singapore, With Love* to MDA’s Film Appeals Committee to review the classification. Nine of the 12 committee members voted to uphold the decision, citing the unbalanced views presented in the film as the main reason.

Even though Singapore continues to censor works that its censors deem controversial or inflammatory in their portrayals of violence, sex, homosexuality, race, religion and – of course – politics, the practice seems to have loosened up over the last two decades. Following the practice in Australia and the UK, for instance, classification has become a

more acceptable way of achieving thought control than an outright ban. This has coincided with the nation-state's deepening embrace of neoliberal globalisation and aspirations to become a profitable and soft-power-generating creative city. More generally, its social life and the arts seem to have undergone a gradual process of cultural liberalisation, although not altogether without regressive moments of cultural repression. When it came to political films such as *Vision of Persistence*, *Singapore Rebel*, *Zahari's 17 Years* and *To Singapore, With Love*, the thoroughly authoritarian impulse from the survivalist-developmental stage of Singapore's postcolonial history persisted.

This article interrogates the persistence of heavy-handed political film censorship at a time of cultural liberalisation in Singapore, when the state has generally shown greater tolerance for alternative political expression in theatre, the literary arts, academia and public events. Part of this has to do with the power and outreach of relatively low-budget independent films and the documentary genre in particular to evoke alternative histories vividly, give voice to the silenced, and channel these voices digitally into the collective cinematic and social media experience of the present. It is also partly to do with the focus of these films on political dissidents and their greater capacity to present a fundamental challenge to The Singapore Story. The Singapore Story is the regime-legitimising official account of Singapore's history, a hegemonic discourse inculcated in the Singaporean polity through the systematic and concerted efforts of the many avenues of social control and official communications available to the ruling elite (Barr & Skrbis, 2008).

As Singapore approached its highly symbolic 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of independence in 2015, the state became especially sensitive and pro-active about choosing what the nation should collectively remember about Singapore's past. Together with the death of founding father Lee Kuan Yew in March of that year, the extended spectacle of jubilee celebrations provided tremendous emotional and ideological opportunities and resources for the People's Action Party (PAP) government to regain hegemony after the ruling party had experienced its worst electoral losses in the now iconic general elections of 2011 (GE2011). Its main approach to achieving this has been to sponsor widespread national nostalgia coupled with highly selective censorship of political films that challenge the dominant official discourse in ways that can erode the government's electoral dominance and political authority.

### **The New Normal in the Neoliberal Creative City**

GE2011 has been described as a watershed event in Singapore's political development. The PAP was able to win only 60.14 per cent of the total vote, but – because of the first-past-the-post system – it took 81 of the 87 seats in parliament. In one of the group constituencies, a 5-member opposition team mounted by the Workers' Party (WP) managed to beat the PAP team by a comfortable margin of almost 10 per cent. The losing team included two cabinet ministers, including Singapore's first and only female minister. This was the PAP's worst performance since independence.

Among the factors working against the PAP was the negative public perception of some of its candidates as elitist, arrogant and out of touch with the common people (Tan, 2008). The government has been blamed for policy failures and held responsible for Singapore becoming an expensive and overcrowded city where public housing has become much less affordable and the transport infrastructure has not kept up with the demands of a population made denser by overly liberal immigration policies. Instead of overhauling

an economic-growth-obsessed system that has produced deep inequalities of income and wealth, the government seemed content to only tweak it (Low, 2014). The government was also held accountable for high-profile mistakes such as a suspected terrorist's escape from detention in Singapore and a series of flash floods that disrupted business and daily life. The government's heavy-handed and bullying style, a hallmark of its tough survivalist and developmental years, seemed no longer acceptable to an emboldened electorate. In fact, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong made a public apology for the mistakes of his administration, which was an unprecedented gesture.

Meanwhile, the WP was more successful than other opposition parties due to its ability to "bridge the credibility gap" by recruiting well-credentialed candidates, engaging fully with the constituency grassroots, and managing the party in a disciplined way with careful attention to its public communications, image and branding (Ong & Tim, 2014). In this "new normal", the ruling party faced stronger criticism and challenges from the opposition parties, civil society groups and private citizens. In civil society, for instance, generally apolitical private interest and civic outreach groups were sharing the space with more articulate and politically skilful advocacy groups, including those organised around newer "post-industrial" causes related to public morality and heritage preservation. Greatly assisted by the consciousness-raising and amplifying powers of social media, public intellectuals were becoming more effective in providing ideological leadership and helping to shape emerging counterhegemonic positions and formations. For instance, the highly resonant language of inequality has been providing a formidable challenge to hegemonic accounts of the primacy of economic growth and its trickle-down benefits (Low, 2014).

This new normal in electoral terms has also dovetailed with Singapore's aspirations to become a neoliberal creative city. Potts and Cunningham (2008, pp. 240–241) cite statistics showing that Singapore's creative industries have grown at a faster rate than its GDP since as early as 1986, "part of a sustained trend in post-industrial economies". The National Arts Council (NAC) was set up in 1991 and the National Heritage Board (NHB) in 1993. Formed in 1998, MediaCorp Raintree Pictures, indirectly owned by the state, has been "the closest thing Singapore has to a movie studio" (Ong, 2005). Also in 1998, the government appointed the Singapore Film Commission (SFC) to administer generous and holistic funding programs for developing the film industry. In 2003, SFC came under the umbrella of the MDA, the industry promoter and regulator.

In 2000, the government launched its Renaissance City Report, a comprehensive strategy to develop the arts and heritage sectors, which included allocating significant amounts of funding to arts education and research; more support for major arts companies and the development of technical and management skills; more recognition of and support for talented artists and groups; more programs, facilities and infrastructure; and greater efforts to internationalise the local arts scene. Since then, arts and culture, together with design, and media and communications, have officially constituted Singapore's creative industries. A report on the creative industries in 2002 estimated the creative cluster's value to be between 2.8 and 3.2 per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), lower than in the US (7.8), UK (5) and Australia (3.3) (*Creative Industries Development Strategy*, 2002). Singapore's Workforce Development Agency (<http://www.wda.gov.sg/content/wdaweb/site/L202-SingaporeJOBSpedia/L302-010B-CreativeIndustry.html>) notes that arts, media and design industries contributed 4.4 per cent of GDP and employed more than 138,000 workers in 2009. The agency also notes that, between 2003 and 2010, the number of arts events

doubled and the number of arts companies and societies increased by 90 per cent; there were 20 million visitors to arts and cultural events in 2009; and more than 24,800 people are currently employed just in the arts and culture sector.

The transformation of Singapore from a survivalist and developmental state into a creative global city has not been easy or straightforward. In an infamous essay written in 1993 titled “Disneyland with the Death Penalty”, cyberpunk fiction writer William Gibson (1993) criticised Singapore for having the “look and feel of a very large corporation” – restrained, humourless, conformist and boring in ways that negated real creativity. Singapore, to him, felt like a “glassy simulacrum” where the “physical past ... has almost entirely vanished”. In Singapore, Gibson observed, the cops were not so much on the streets as they were in the heads of the people. A decade later, journalist Michael Backman (2003) reported disparagingly about Singapore’s so-called cultural liberalisation:

I was walking along Boat Quay recently and saw four ladies standing on a bar in a pub, each writhing to music in a sexually-suggestive manner. This is not reform. This is not liberalism. This is sleaze. And sleaze should not be equated with freedom. The most important aspect of freedom, which is aligned to the freedom of the media, is the freedom to be wrong. And it’s that freedom that Singapore needs to cultivate.

Richard Florida, whose work was undoubtedly familiar to Singaporean policymakers and planners, famously argued that one of the necessary ingredients for a successful creative city was the ability to compete for global talent. In his 2005 book *Flight of the Creative Class*, he identified Singapore and other cities in Asia (Bangkok, Osaka, Seoul, Taipei and Tokyo) and Europe (Athens, Barcelona, Helsinki, Lisbon, Naples and Oslo) as “challenged by their lack of appeal to global talent” since they scored poorly on diversity and tolerance (Florida, 2005, p. 173). Florida was nevertheless optimistic about Singapore’s prospects, noting its achievements in the disk drive industry and its hosting of Lucasfilm as positive results of its government’s “targeted strategy to spur a more broadly creative economy by ... investing heavily in artistic and cultural activity, including bolstering its Bohemian Index by supporting street-level culture” (Florida, 2005, p. 177). Two years earlier, *Time Magazine* had published a feature on Singapore that celebrated its cultural flowering, noting how its government would “do ‘whatever it takes’ to attract talent” and had in fact been relaxing “repressive government policies previously enforced in the name of social stability” (Elegant, 2003).

While making a concerted effort to build arts infrastructure and programming in the city and loosening up its policies on street busking, the government has also responded to changing cultural norms over the decades. Since the first in 1982, the government has convened censorship review committees in 1991, 2002 and 2009. The committees have had to renegotiate the balance between “the need to protect the young, maintain social harmony and preserve general moral values”; promoting creative, artistic and educational merit; and increasing choice as appropriate to a maturing society (Siew, 2009). The rapid transition to a neoliberal global city meant that censorship review in Singapore would become increasingly reactive towards the loss of control that accompanies globalisation, cultural permeability and media convergence.

Thus, while the PAP government has generally allowed for cultural liberalisation as a way to attract global talent that it regards as necessary for the global city to achieve and maintain an economically pre-eminent position in the global economy, it has also had to selectively exercise censorship of political art works that effectively threatened its electoral

prospects and questioned its political authority, even more pressingly in the new normal. Maintaining effective control over the media, particularly in terms of constraining political scrutiny and commentary, therefore remains fundamental to keeping the PAP government in power, despite the various accommodations made to cultural liberalisation (Rodan, 2004). As this article demonstrates, other forms of cultural expression, such as films and theatrical productions, are also subject to these constraints. These include political films that fundamentally challenge The Singapore Story, which has provided justificatory resources for maintaining PAP hegemony amidst the policy trade-offs and political tensions that intensify as Singapore's neoliberal global-city condition comes into conflict with its nation-state condition.

### The Singapore Story's Hegemonic Role

Greater popular scepticism of the PAP establishment in the new normal has also meant more articulate challenges to The Singapore Story, a hegemonic account authored and authorised by the winners of history. Loh Kah Seng (1998) argues that the early PAP establishment disavowed "history" as a regressive inspiration for nation-building, but by the late 1970s started to take an active and positive approach to constructing history for ideological mass control. It is The Singapore Story's focus on national vulnerability, constraints and challenges that transmits and preserves the survivalist mentality well into the present and also harnesses it for the purpose of justifying the PAP government's authority. The focus on the nation's significant but fragile success is aimed at encouraging confidence in securing Singapore's future and the role of political leadership in this. It could also sustain enough of a culture of anxiety to militate against complacency about achieving and maintaining material affluence.

More broadly, The Singapore Story is the nation's grand narrative that not only enshrines fundamental principles of survival, success, multiracialism, meritocracy, Asian values and pragmatism, but also interpolates the PAP establishment, its opponents and ordinary Singaporeans into subject positions of hero, villain-at-large and rescued-but-still-vulnerable victim respectively. Society is thus inscribed by a hegemonic account of an ahistorical middle-class generation that is anxious (even paranoid), materialistic and politically apathetic. Their prospects, according to this narrative, are threatened by villainous political opposition, past and present. It is in this context that the censorship of *Vision of Persistence*, *Singapore Rebel*, *Zahari's 17 Years* and *To Singapore, With Love* may be understood, since their sympathetic portrayals of political dissidents may provoke critical questions about their villainous characterisation in The Singapore Story and, more fundamentally, the government's efforts at thought control through its sole authorship of official national history.

Lee Kuan Yew's 2-volume memoirs (1998; 2000) – the former titled and the latter subtitled *The Singapore Story* – as well as a few other volumes written by the formidable Founding Father have come to serve as foundational scripture for The Singapore Story. As I noted in a psychoanalytical reading of Singapore's political culture (2009, p. 48), "The politically emasculating state assumes the superior status and controlling position of the patriarch – originating, elaborating, and defending the 'law of the Father' that has taken the form of an official national discourse that defines the conditions of possibility for what can be legitimately thought, expressed, and communicated in Singapore". In a locally published opinion piece that famously attracted public rebuke from the ruling establishment, Catherine Lim (1994) wrote: "Singapore is often seen as the creation of the PAP, made to its image and likeness".

The government's response to the emergence of counterhegemonic challenges has been, in large part, to focus on the more effective public communication of its philosophy, policies and practices, whose fundamentals it continues to hold onto tightly. Media relations, particularly in terms of engaging with social media, have become an important aspect of this. In Singapore's fortieth year of independence, Discovery Networks Asia produced a 3-episode documentary titled *The History of Singapore*, which presented a straightforward account of Singapore's success as a puzzle whose solution could only be good governance by Lee Kuan Yew and the PAP government. In this, the documentary bore the same pedagogical imprint as Lee's memoirs, and his ubiquitous and authoritative presence through the frequent insertions of his interview segments re-established his role as "chief pedagogue" (Tan, 2012). In the documentary, Lee declares:

Unless you know where you came from, unless you know what your ancestors have been through, you have no reference point. What makes us different from say the Thais, or the Filipinos, or the Sri Lankans? The difference is how we came here, how we developed, and that requires a sense of history. (Lambert, 2006)

The government also continues to organise periodic year-long national-level public engagement exercises, the latest of which was the Our Singapore Conversation (OSC) in 2012. With public communications clearly in mind, the OSC exercise was careful to explain how the perspectives, aspirations and ideas of an impressive 47,000 participants had filtered into the policy process, with the prime minister himself making several references to them in his annual National Day Rally speech. The mode of engagement was also very self-consciously different from previous exercises, which had been dominated by committee meetings and top-down forums with high-ranking officials at the helm. OSC's reach was significantly larger and more varied, using peer-to-peer engagement techniques that were looser, more creative, less judgmental and less hierarchical (Kuah & Lim, 2014).

At one level, the OSC was designed to satisfy the desire for recognition that an expanding and more assertive middle class would express, according to the familiar story of liberalisation. At another level, the OSC was a kind of state-organised public ritual, designed to bring Singaporeans together to perform their national identity through the exchange of personal stories woven together into a national tapestry to dress up The Singapore Story in more vibrant and complex colours. The ritual served as an opportunity to tell and re-tell this otherwise stale national narrative, especially necessary to counter the alienating tendencies that attend the loss of community, history and certainty as Singapore's nation-state character collides with its global-city aspirations. As an ideological effort to mollify a more assertive middle class and repair a weakening consensus, the OSC performed a conservative role.

### **Challenging The Singapore Story**

In this time of cultural liberalisation in Singapore, the state has generally shown relatively high levels of tolerance for alternative political expression in theatre, the literary arts, academia and public events, in contrast to its heavy-handed approach to documentary films on political dissidents. One reason could be that these other activities seem to attract an elite, and thus limited, audience; whereas the more emotionally accessible documentaries, especially in the context of circulation in social media, can connect more readily with a mass audience, potentially activating widespread critical and counterhegemonic thinking.

Similarly, critical writing in mass media vehicles such as *The Straits Times* and popular blog sites such as Yawning Bread and The Online Citizen (TOC) is treated much less tolerantly than the more elite critiques in academic journals and monographs. Alex Au, the author of Yawning Bread and a gay rights activist, has been judged to have scandalised the court and, on another occasion, was asked to remove content that was critical of the judiciary and to issue an apology. In 2011, the government classified TOC as a political organisation under the Political Donations Act, which limited its ability to raise funds from foreign and anonymous sources.

In the decades following independence, the government had a more pronounced view of the arts as a potentially dangerous field that could radically incite audiences to subvert the established order that it was trying to institutionalise in the interest of political control, national development and nation-building. Through harsh security laws inherited from its colonial predecessor, the government detained several Chinese-language theatre practitioners, artists, intellectuals and other left-wing activists who had formed ideological and political alliances to expose and oppose exploitative practices that accompanied Singapore's pro-capitalist industrial policies. For instance, members of Kuo Pao Kun's Practice Performing Arts School, who deliberately lived among the working class to gain the experience to devise socially committed theatre works, were arrested and forced to confess on television. William Peterson (2001, p. 36) notes the government's ominous view that "theater had become a handmaiden to communist ideology in mainland China" and thus had the "potential to undermine the security of the state". The radical possibilities of the arts were held in deep suspicion.

In 1987, the government unleashed Operation Spectrum and invoked the Internal Security Act to detain without trial 22 people, accusing them of a "Marxist conspiracy" to overthrow the state. It alleged that student leader Tan Wah Piow, who was living in London in exile after fleeing Singapore in 1976, had masterminded the conspiracy. The group, whose ostensible aim was to improve the welfare of the rapidly growing number of migrant workers in fast-developing Singapore, included lawyers, members of the WP, Catholic social workers, members of the recently formed civil society organisation Association of Women for Action and Research (AWARE), and socially conscious members of the theatre group The Third Stage. They were deemed a threat to Singapore's security and the maintenance of public order. Even in the larger international context that witnessed the spread of liberation theology in Latin America and the toppling of the dictatorial Marcos regime by "people power" in the Philippines, the Singapore government's severe actions drew a critical response from international organisations, foreign media and political leaders from other countries, causing its reputation to be, as Peterson (2001, p. 39) describes it, "seriously tarnished". But as Michael Barr (2010, pp. 360–361) argues:

[then-Prime Minister] Lee Kuan Yew must have expected public skepticism about the accusations against the detainees to undermine the government's credibility, but he was clearly prepared to bear this cost in order to establish a firm pattern of effective authoritarian rule that he could be confident would outlast his premiership. This he did by imposing a pattern of tough love both on society and, it must be said, on his successors in government... [The activists] were accused of believing in Marxism, but the heart of their inspiration was traditional Catholic social teaching, the YCW [Young Christian Workers] movement, and, more remotely, Saul Alinsky's community organizing techniques and the orthodox Catholic strands of liberation theology – the elements with which even the Congregation for the Doctrine of



the Faith could not find fault. It was a telling sign for the future that even such an innocent cocktail as this was sufficient to elicit government violence and repression.

In 1994, the government proscribed the practice of forum theatre and performance art by cutting financial assistance for performances under these categories and requiring a S\$10,000 deposit that could be confiscated if the authorities found the performances offensive (Lee, 1996). This de facto blanket ban on two theatrical forms was likely based on their semi-unscripted and participatory nature, which left too much that was unpredictable in their interaction with audiences. In the case of forum theatre, its association with “Third World” emancipative Marxist theatre practices also rang alarm bells in the long shadow of the Marxist Conspiracy detentions. After a decade, the proscription was lifted in 2004 and forum theatre, in particular, has become a very popular form decoupled from its Marxist origins and associated instead with the kind of expressive spontaneity that a new creative economy required (Tan, 2013). Since then, there have been no bans on productions in theatre and the performing arts. The state has in fact been encouraging arts groups to engage in a process of self-classification, a move that – though appearing to be consistent with cultural liberalisation – has been opposed by many arts groups that regard this as an insidious institutionalisation of self-censorship.

Several theatre productions that dealt with the theme of political detention in Singapore have survived the censors, relatively unscathed, in recent years. The Necessary Stage’s *Gemuk Girls*, which premiered in 2008 to critical acclaim, presented a fictionalised and thoroughly humanistic account of commitment to ideals, detention without trial under the Internal Security Act, and the relationships that suffer as a result (Kapadia, 2011). *Square Moon*, written by former political detainee Wong Souk Yee, was performed in 2013. A fictionalised account of detention without trial, torture and the “corrupting effect of power”, the production met with some obstacles in terms of finding a venue at which it could be performed and its sudden exclusion from the M1 Fringe Festival that was organised by The Necessary Stage (Au, 2012). *Square Moon* and *Gemuk Girls* were obvious references to Operation Spectrum in 1987 and Operation Coldstore in 1963.

Apart from the climate of cultural liberalisation, the fact that the government allowed these productions to be performed in public may have something to do with their fictionalised nature, but is more likely related to the way in which contemporary theatre outreach has still been limited to a cultural elite of sorts. Although local theatre ticket prices remain relatively affordable, it is unlikely that these performances could attract and influence mass audiences in the way that films often can. Also, theatre performances such as these typically run for only a few nights and, even though they may be restaged for future audiences, their effect is rarely as lasting as that of films, which can be preserved and recirculated in DVDs and online platforms. In this regard, theatre is much more site-specific than films, which can be viewed just about anywhere.

The literary arts have also been interested in reconsidering Singapore’s history and questioning The Singapore Story. Award-winning Singaporean poet Alfian Bin Sa’at, for instance, has shown an abiding interest in critical questions of collective history and memory. A blurb described his second published collection of poems *A History of Amnesia* (2001) in the following way:

In mining our psyche, [Alfian] casts light where whispers and shadows lurk. He draws inspiration from censored histories, subsumed myths and invokes imagined voices from the exiled, demanding of the reader to witness the ubiquitous ideological fictions that surround us.

“Mr Chia sits in his dark cell” is a poem from this collection about opposition politician Chia Thye Poh, who was detained without trial for 23 years, followed by a restriction of his civil rights for another nine years. Alfian (2001, p. 65) describes the horror of political elimination as intense personal confusion and doubt in insanity-inducing conditions of pure silence and darkness, from which one emerges broken and acquiescent.

[...] Mr Chia sits in his cell  
In complete darkness  
Telling his right hand  
From his left foot

He tries to recall  
Which side he is on  
He does not know  
Which side has betrayed him  
[...]  
When the sun finally greets him like a stranger  
Mr Chia will keep his mouth firmly sealed  
A man who has eaten darkness will not let any light enter  
The cave of his blind organs his speechless bones.

In “Singapore, you are not my country”, from his first published collection *One Fierce Hour*, Alfian (1998, p. 39) writes:

[...] Tell that to all those exiles whose names are forgotten but  
who leave behind a bad taste in the thoughtful mouth,  
reminding us that the flapping sunned linen shelters a  
whiff of chloroform. [...]

While these are thoroughly evocative and emotive descriptions that have the power to draw sympathy for the opponents of the establishment, poetry still remains an elite pre-occupation in fast-paced Singapore, where the cultures of cinema attendance and viewing videos on social media far exceed the culture of literary appreciation.

The Singapore Story has also been subjected to critical interrogation on the academic front. In 2005, the National University of Singapore hosted a symposium called “Paths Not Taken”, a significant event that brought together academics from Singapore, Australia, the UK and elsewhere, as well as more than 200 registered participants, to debate alternative perspectives on Singapore’s postwar history. Presentations and discussions at the symposium formed the basis of a 2008 edited book (Barr & Trocki, 2008) that explored the “cultural, intellectual, and political dynamism” of Singapore from the 1950s to the 1970s, when pluralism was marked by a contestation of alternative visions for Singapore’s future advanced by a diverse array of political parties, activists and popular movements. In many ways, the book challenged the orthodox account of this period by identifying and elaborating on the vibrant ideological and political developments outside the direct influence of the PAP.

A younger generation of historians has led the revisionist charge against Singapore’s rigid, linear and myth-laden public history. A large part of Loh Kah Seng’s work, for instance, focuses somewhat “inconveniently” on topics such as fires and the mass resettlement of kampong dwellers, leprosy and compulsory segregation laws, the left-wing trade union movement, and the British military withdrawal from Singapore. With other like-minded historians such as Seng Guo-quan, Lim Cheng Tju and Edgar Liao, he has worked on topics such as left-wing student activism in the Chinese- and English-medium universities in

the 1950s and 1960s. In July 2014, Loh, in conjunction with independent bookstore and publisher Select Books, launched “Living With Myths”, a forum series aimed at unpacking the myths of Singapore history. Myths, according to this project, are a rendering of history as “useful for non-historical pursuits” (<http://livingwithmyths.wix.com/livingwithmyths>). The website explains:

By myths, we do not mean fabrications, but discursive devices that have become accepted as part of our “common sense”. Myths are a shorthand for official discourses and policies; they thus mask countervailing views of history and obscure other possibilities for the future. As Singapore celebrates 50 years of nationhood in 2015, being aware of myths is an important social project that will make us a more mature, self-reflexive and inclusive people. (<http://livingwithmyths.wix.com/livingwithmyths>)

The organisers of “Living With Myths” have associated myths with official discourse, pointing out the social disadvantages of unconsciously imbibing them. However, it should be noted that any effort to rewrite history, even if solidly based on factual evidence and academic protocols, will find it hard not to be itself part of a myth-(re)making exercise. In this regard, “Living With Myths” succeeded in bringing together a healthy diversity of perspectives. Not all presenters directly challenged the hegemonic account or proposed definitive alternative accounts. Some even argued that there was value in living with mythologisation in history writing, since these were interpretations that could provide popular access to an increasingly opaque past for the useful purposes of the present, a view that Goh (2014) has characterised as the “interpretive” – as opposed to “critical” – approach to the politics of heritage.

One of the speakers at “Living With Myths” was Thum Pingtjin, a Singaporean scholar at Oxford University, who has – among other things – written about Operation Coldstore as being motivated not by security considerations as much as by Lee Kuan Yew’s struggle for political power against a credible rival – the progressive and anti-colonial left wing led by Lim Chin Siong. Opponents of the revisionist turn in academic histories of Singapore have variously accused the work of revisionist historians such as Thum, who have been using recently declassified British colonial records, of being irrelevant to contemporary Singapore, a politically motivated “cherry-picking” of records to support an oppositional reading of history, and a threat to social cohesion and national security (akikonomu, 2014). A forceful attempt at discrediting the arguments of revisionist and alternative historians can be found in Kumar Ramakrishna’s 2015 book *‘Original Sin’?: Revisiting the Revisionist Critique of the 1963 Operation Coldstore in Singapore*.

A number of former leftists and political detainees have come forward more recently to publicise their side of the story. They have produced a number of edited books and memoirs such as Spectrum detainee Teo Soh Lung’s *Beyond the Blue Gate: Recollections of a Political Prisoner* (2010), which provided a detailed account of her experience as a detainee. Teo later edited a book with fellow detainee Low Yit Leng in 2012 titled *Escape from the Lion’s Paw: Reflections of Singapore’s Political Exiles*, in which the voices of exiles Ang Swee Chai, Francis Khoo, Tan Wah Piao, Tsui Hon Kwong, Tang Fong Har and Ho Juan Thai were mobilised as an argument against the Internal Security Act. Poh Soo Kai, Tan Kok Fang and Hong Lysa’s 2013 edited volume *The 1963 Operation Coldstore in Singapore: Commemorating 50 Years* supported vivid autobiographical perspectives with academic analysis. The late Guillaume Arotçarena, one of four Catholic priests named in the so-called Marxist Conspiracy in 1987, published his autobiographical book *Priest in Geylang: The Untold Story of the Geylang Catholic Centre* in 2015, providing insights into and details of Operation Spectrum from his point of view. Veteran journalist Clement Mesenas’s 2014 book *Dissident Voices* provided

brief biographies of Vincent Cheng, Chia Thye Poh, Catherine Lim, Lim Chin Siong, Lim Hock Siew, David Marshall, Ong Eng Guan, Said Zahari, Francis Seow and Tan Wah Piao.

There have also been public talks and events, such as a mass commemoration of Operation Coldstore at Hong Lim Park in 2013, and several videos have been uploaded to YouTube and circulated freely on social media. Although these activities have not generally been proscribed, the emergence of these former detainees has very likely played a role in precipitating the government's reaction to revisionist histories. Making similar arguments to Thum, former Coldstore detainee Poh Soo Kai wrote a commentary that was published on a website hosted by the Australian National University (ANU). In a lengthy statement to refute Poh's claims, the government argued that:

Attempts by Dr Poh and revisionists to recast the struggle and deny its roots in the communist strategy for domination including the use of violence, are misleading and disingenuous. Their disregard of the facts is disrespectful to the many Singaporeans who chose a non-communist path at great risk to themselves, and contributed to the success of modern Singapore. (Gafoor, 2014)

Prime Minister Lee, on his Facebook page, reinforced this message by asserting that:

a few hardcore [communist and pro-communist activists] still deny these historical facts. They don't want to admit that they had fought on the wrong side, and that luckily for Singapore they lost... Some "revisionist" historians make this argument too. One motivation: Cast doubt on the legitimacy of the (People's Action Party) government, not just in the 1960s, but today. (quoted in "PM Lee on declassified British documents", 2014)

As these episodes demonstrate, the survivalist period has bequeathed a long legacy of depicting vulnerability and threat in somewhat hysterical tones in the public discourse, and provided muscular justifications for the hard policies and actions deemed necessary to overcome these threats. Yao Souchou (2007) refers to these manifestations of contemporary national anxieties as a "culture of excess". In this regard, the claim that Tan's film *To Singapore, With Love* could undermine national security might seem a disproportionate one, but it bears the hallmarks of this culture of excess, drawn from a survivalist legacy that has witnessed the arrests of socially conscious arts practitioners and the blanket censorship of art forms associated with left-wing ideological and political traditions. The official justification for banning the film makes vulgar assumptions about the nature of truth, history, balance and objectivity. It operates on the anachronistic principle of governing by imposing ignorance, rather than promoting open discussion from which "truth" may be deliberately revealed, understood, agreed upon and more widely owned.

In Singapore's new normal, when challenges to the PAP establishment have become commonplace, banning the film not only backfires through the forbidden fruit effect at a time when imposing a total ban is impossible, but also creates more popular mistrust in a government that now appears to be hiding something and lacking the confidence to debate and clarify in an open and more transparent arena with greater access to information. The ban prompted Singaporeans, offended by the official view that they could not think for themselves, to travel overseas to various locations to watch the film as a gesture of civil disobedience. A number of educational institutions in Singapore took advantage of the loopholes in the classification system to show the film in classrooms for express "educational purposes".

So, to summarise, why were the political films by Tan and See banned, while other works seem to have remained unscathed? Partly, it was because the state needs to adopt an overall policy of cultural liberalisation to attract global talent and promote Singapore as a

creative city, which means that it needs to be very selective in its use of censorship. When it does censor a work, the work is likely to be regarded as a threat to its electoral prospects (especially in the new normal) and its political authority to govern. While theatre and books can be powerfully emotive means of raising sympathy for the political underdog, these media remain for the most part within the purview of Singapore's cultural elite and are unlikely to enjoy broader reach to politicise or even conscientise the wider electorate. This is even truer of academic research and publications that appeal at best to the intellectual community. Furthermore, documentary films – unlike feature films – give the illusion of verisimilitude, even though they necessarily blur any clear-cut distinction between fact and fiction. Beyond a historical notion of “truth” that conforms to academic research protocols, documentaries are able to point to a more complex reality and truth by appealing, often vividly, to the emotional as much as to the cerebral sensibilities. “Independent-style” documentaries also have the advantage of being relatively less expensive to make and are in formats and proportions that may be more conducive to distribution and circulation in social media. Their outreach is greater, their presence more ephemeral, and they are more able to evade state control through arts funding and other support.

### **Nostalgia and Depoliticisation**

While selective censorship of political films that challenge the dominant official discourse has been one part of the state's approach to maintaining its hegemony, the other part of this approach involves the sponsorship of widespread national nostalgia in ways that depoliticise the past. Generally, nostalgia may be viewed as a pleasurable mode of consuming the past by remembering it in a selective, sentimentalised and romanticised way, which disavows the more inconvenient memories.

Singapore's jubilee year celebrations, building up to its grandest-ever National Day Parade in August 2015, were branded as SG50. Its website states:

Anchored on the theme of “Celebrating as One People”, SG50 is an inclusive celebration comprising a series of activities contributed by the people, private and public sectors. All projects will go through an evaluation process, with each successful application receiving up to 90% of the project expenditure, capped at \$50,000 per project. Each project will be evaluated on its ability to: raise awareness of our Singaporean identity and sense of belonging to Singapore; reach out and engage the community; as well as show potential in successful completion and execution according to plan. (<https://www.sg/sg50/Celebration%20Fund.aspx>)

Many of the projects were heritage-focused, featuring personal and social memories of popular culture and places in Singapore's past. This is part of a recent trend that has seen increased public interest in popular heritage. A few years earlier, in 2011, the Singapore National Library Board launched the web portal SingaporeMemory.sg, as part of the Singapore Memory Project (SMP), described as:

a whole-of-nation movement that aims to capture and document precious moments and memories related to Singapore; recollections not merely from individual Singaporeans, but also organisations, associations, companies and groups. The SMP currently involves partners (academic, research and library institutions, heritage agencies, public agencies, private entities and community organisations) and Memory Corps – volunteers who serve various roles, such as helping individuals with difficulties documenting their memories; connecting the SMP to people with memories of key Singapore events, personalities and places; and enrolling more volunteers to join the SMP cause. (<http://www.singaporememory.sg/Help-Info>)

Emblazoned on irememberSG, SMP's official companion blog, is the text:

The Singapore Story is not simply the tale of one city's rise from third-world to first, but it is also one enriched by each and every one of us and our unique experiences. irememberSG hopes to share these stories, relive these memories and retrace the steps trodden by people who've experienced Singapore.

Together with OSC, these efforts have the effect of re-packaging The Singapore Story in a more emotive, participatory and bottom-up way that will appeal to a more sophisticated and globalised citizenry, but they are mostly based on the consumerist logic of a more self-indulgent middle class. Daniel Goh (2014) identifies two approaches in discussions of the politics of heritage: a critical approach that views heritage as commodification, reflecting also the dominant ideology of the ruling elite; and an interpretive approach that views heritage as a clarification of the past for present purposes. In the former approach, one might critically analyse SG50, the SMP and OSC as only the latest and perhaps most elaborate efforts by the government to sanitise and commoditise its past for the consumption and quite possibly diversion of an electorate with an increased appetite for political change. In the latter approach, one might analyse these national efforts as examples of ritualised national-level activities that ride the wave of nostalgia and depoliticise the past in a renewed and seemingly more inclusive version and performance of The Singapore Story. In fact, there are plans in the pipeline to launch a monumental number of books on Singapore in 2015 and 2016 – the Institute of Policy Studies alone is planning to publish 50 books, many of them authored by academics (Salleh, 2014).

When it comes to cinema, the broad appeal of nostalgia has not been lost to filmmakers. In the context of a fast-changing city, a rapidly shifting demographic and a cosmopolitanised culture, Singaporeans yearn for markers of identity, historical reference and a sense of place. There have been several Singapore films in recent years that may be described as nostalgic in this respect. Kelvin Tong's *It's A Great Great World* (2011) is a romantic film that strings together four stories set in a popular amusement park in the 1940s to 1950s, blending recreated sets and archival photographs of iconic places in Singapore's history, and making simple references to Singapore's separation from Malaysia and the communist threat. Royston Tan, Eva Tang and Victric Thng have collectively made nostalgic documentaries, *Old Places* in 2010 and *Old Romances* in 2012, that feature fast-disappearing or already gone everyday places in Singapore, as they were remembered by ordinary Singaporeans who had been invited to call in to a radio program to share their memories and anecdotes.

Much earlier, in 2003, Royston Tan made *The Old Man and the River* (2003), a short film that captures the thoughts of an old man as he accompanies his young grandson on a boat ride down the Singapore River, explaining in Hokkien that the physical residues from the past are valuable because they give him the opportunity to "reminisce" and the younger generation a chance "to understand how our forefathers lived". The film was, in fact, commissioned by the National Heritage Board.

Funded by the Singapore Film Commission, the high-budget *1965* premiered in July 2015. This SG50 film revolves around the lives of ordinary people caught up in the violence and confusion of race riots in the 1960s, with Singapore's impending separation from Malaysia and *Konfrontasi* with Indonesia in the background. Despite its high production values, the film fails to deliver a coherent and believable story, mainly because of its barely concealed effort to retell The Singapore Story literally and deliver the propagandistic message that the fate of every Singaporean was bound up with the heroic leadership of Lee Kuan

Yew. Rather than attempting to demonstrate the truth of this claim, the story is instead interspersed with re-enactments of the historical Lee Kuan Yew, ending with a shamelessly opportunistic scene depicting footage from Lee's actual funeral in March 2015.

A second and far more successful SG50 film was *7 Letters*. Fully funded by the Singapore Film Commission, it consists of 7 short films, each a "love letter" to Singapore, made by 7 award-winning Singaporean directors, including Royston Tan, Kelvin Tong and Tan Pin Pin. Initial reviews have been very positive and the public's response has been overwhelming, with all screenings fully booked. Royston Tan, who led the project, was keen to explain to the media that, although the SFC provided 100 per cent of the funding, the agency fully trusted the filmmakers and gave them "100 per cent control of the entire film" (Kwa, 2015). The fact that Royston Tan and Tan Pin Pin had both been censored by the MDA in the recent past makes this film – and claim – especially interesting. The state must be aware that artistic achievement and critical acclaim are important for the creative economy to be credible, so it values films such as this where the filmmakers are given the aesthetic autonomy to rise above the commercial and propagandistic functions of a flawed film such as *1965*. *7 Letters* escapes the rigidities of *The Singapore Story* and rides the popular wave of nostalgic pleasure, while staying within the political "out-of-bound" markers that were quite clearly set through the examples of *Vision of Persistence*, *Singapore Rebel*, *Zahari's 17 Years* and *To Singapore, With Love*.

One might argue that this is a case of successful co-optation of artists by the state. But in the context of a neoliberal creative city, instead of fully co-opting or banning filmmakers and losing their transgressive instincts altogether, the state may prefer to maintain an interdependent relationship with filmmakers in such a way as to be able to harness these transgressive instincts for critical acclaim. Otherwise, disengaged filmmakers may use their talents and the opportunities afforded by digital technologies and social media to effectively challenge the state's hegemony and weaken the ruling party's electoral prospects in the new normal. When that happens, it is quite likely that the older authoritarian modes of thought control will re-emerge, but only selectively.

## GE2015 and the Return to Hegemony

Singaporeans went to the voting booths again on 11 September 2015, returning the PAP to power in what turned out to be its strongest general election showing in more than a decade, winning 69.9 per cent of the popular vote and 83 of a total of 89 parliamentary seats. In light of the new normal following GE2011, this PAP victory was generally surprising, but it was especially so to those who had expected the political liberalisation narrative to unfold more robustly in Singapore. Instead, the PAP victory signalled the durability of its hegemonic dominance.

The jubilee year celebrations did not backfire after all, and were probably successful in depoliticising the new normal by helping Singaporeans to remember the past in establishment-supporting ways. The death of Lee Kuan Yew in March 2015 added solemnity and gravity to these nostalgic pleasures and re-established the current PAP as the leading protagonist in *The Singapore Story*. All in all, the spectacles of 2015 had a conservative effect.

One particularly notable response to Lee Kuan Yew's death was a video uploaded to YouTube by Singaporean blogger Amos Yee only days after Lee had passed away. In this video, titled "Lee Kuan Yew is Finally Dead!", Yee launched an expletive-laden diatribe

against the former prime minister, insulted Lee's supporters, drew an unlikely analogy to Jesus only to insult both the PAP and some Christians, displayed a caricature of Lee having sex with former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, and challenged Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong to sue him.

Dramatically rejecting the norms of self-censorship and circumspection that characterise much of Singaporean political content on the Internet (Lee, 2005), the confronting video attracted more than a million views and provoked public debate over the right to free speech and the issue of online censorship. It also incurred the wrath of many netizens, who were still mourning the late Lee, and ultimately led to Yee being arrested, charged, tried as an adult, found guilty, and sentenced to four weeks in jail. However, several prominent members of civil society, including Alfian Sa'at, rallied behind Yee, pointing to the case as a reflection of the weakness of human rights standards and lack of freedom of expression in Singapore. Given that Yee was just an attention-seeking teenager, the public's outrage and the state's reaction seemed disproportionate and very much like a moral panic, presenting a distraction from the potential legitimisation crisis that GE2011 had signalled earlier (Hall et al., 1978).

While Yee's case continued to make headlines in the local news until early August, the controversy had largely petered out and public attention soon turned to GE2015. However, despite the PAP's landslide victory, the MDA chose to compel the producers of a parody show, *Chestnuts 50: The UnbelYeevable Jubilee Edition*, to remove around 40 minutes of a sketch inspired by Amos Yee or risk losing their arts entertainment licence, just hours before the opening performance.

The spectacle of Amos Yee may have helped to curb the anti-establishment sentiment that had gained popularity in the new normal. Many who had been critical of the government might have chosen to distance themselves from the growing mood of scepticism that Yee's grotesque performance had come to symbolise. Thus, amid the national pride and collective nostalgia of SG50, critical and even liberal voices may have sounded more shrill than usual, reinforcing the ideology that they were at best a vocal minority. In these conditions, old-style authoritarian censorship still worked to help regain PAP hegemony.

This article has attempted to explain Singapore's cultural liberalisation path, which has been tortuous because of the contradictory tendencies inherent in the state's drive to transform Singapore into a neoliberal creative city, while simultaneously attempting to maintain the stability of the regime-legitimising hegemonic discourse in the form of The Singapore Story. The neoliberalisation of global-city Singapore has involved a progressive loosening of long-held restraints on cultural expression, yet paradoxically includes revanchist moments of authoritarian repression and censorship whenever the cultural energies that are released in the process are perceived by the state to have become politically threatening.

As the cases discussed above have illustrated, the right to narrate The Singapore Story remains jealously guarded by the state. Films, theatrical performances and literary works that too strenuously interrogate official national history, or that question the PAP government's political authority, tend to quickly encounter various forms of state censorship. Conversely, the state has actively funded and supported films and other artistic works that nostalgically portray The Singapore Story. While the state's attitude towards alternative political expression within theatrical performances appears to have become much more liberal, politically critical films and social media continue to be subject to state repression, apparently in proportion to the potential outreach, and thus possible influence, of these works. In the political anxieties that pervade the new normal following the PAP's electoral



losses in GE2011, these tensions will likely remain an enduring dynamic that will continue to dictate how history will be remembered and celebrated in neoliberal Singapore.

## Acknowledgments

The research for this article was supported by an Academic Research Fund (Tier 1) grant from the Ministry of Education, Singapore. I am grateful to Augustin Boey for his research assistance.

## References

- Agence France Presse. (2002, 4 January). Documentary on Jeya withdrawn from film festival. Retrieved from <http://www.singapore-window.org/sw02/020104af.htm>
- Akikonomu. (2014, 29 July). Living With Myths I: The Singapore Story. *Illusio*.
- Alfian, B. S. (1998). *One fierce hour*. Singapore: Landmark Books.
- Alfian, B. S. (2001). *A history of amnesia*. Singapore: Ethos Books.
- Arotçarena, G. (2015). *Priest in Geylang: The untold story of the Geylang Catholic Centre*. Singapore: Ethos Books.
- Au, A. (2012, 8 September). Square Moon swallowed by public tax monster. *Yawning Bread*.
- Backman, M. (2003, 8 October). Is S'pore being paranoid? *Today* (Singapore). Retrieved from <http://www.singapore-window.org/sw03/031008t1.htm>
- Barr, M. (2010). Marxists in Singapore? Lee Kuan Yew's campaign against Catholic social justice activists in the 1980s. *Critical Asian Studies*, 42(3), 335–362.
- Barr, M. & Skrbiš, Z. (2008). *Constructing Singapore: Elitism, ethnicity and the nation-building project*. Copenhagen: NIAS Press.
- Barr, M. & Trocki, C. (2008). *Paths not taken: Political pluralism in post-war Singapore*. Singapore: NUS Press.
- Boo, J. F. (Dir.), Khoo, E. (Dir.), Neo, J. (Dir.), Rajagopal, K. (Dir.), Tan, P. P. (Dir.), Tan, R. (Dir.), & Tong, K. (Dir.). (2015). *7 Letters* [Film]. Singapore: Chuan Pictures.
- Creative Industries Development Strategy*. (2002, September). Report of the ERC Services Subcommittee Workgroup on Creative Industries, Singapore.
- Elegant, S. (2003, 30 June). A lion in winter. *Time*. Retrieved from [http://www.time.com/time/asia/covers/501030707/sea\\_singapore.html](http://www.time.com/time/asia/covers/501030707/sea_singapore.html)
- Florida, R. (2005). *The flight of the creative class: The new global competition for talent*. New York: Harper.
- Gafoor, B. (2014, 18 December). Response to Poh Soo Kai's allegations. Letter to the Editor of *New Mandala*.
- Gibson, W. (1993). Disneyland with the death penalty. *Wired*, 1.04. Retrieved from [http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/1.04/gibson\\_pr.html](http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/1.04/gibson_pr.html)
- Goh, D. P. S. (2014). Between history and heritage: Post-colonialism, globalisation, and the remaking of Malacca, Penang, and Singapore. *TRaNS: Trans-Regional and -National Studies of Southeast Asia*, 2(1), 79–101.
- Hall, S., Critcher, C., Jefferson, T., Clarke, J., & Roberts, B. (1978). *Policing the crisis: Mugging, the state, and law and order*. London: Macmillan.
- Kapadia, N. (2011, 10 November). Size matters. *The Flying Inkpot*.
- Kobayashi, Y. H. (2012). Documentary filmmaking, civil activism and the new media in Singapore: The case of Martyn See as citizen journalist. In D. Lim & H. Yamamoto (Eds.), *Film in contemporary Southeast Asia: Cultural interpretation and social intervention* (pp. 168–185). Oxford: Routledge.
- Kuah, A. & Lim, S. H. (2014). After our Singapore conversation: The futures of governance. *Ethos*, 13. Retrieved from <https://www.ccollege.gov.sg/Knowledge/ethos/Ethos%20-%20Issue%2013,%20June%202014/Pages/After%20Our%20Singapore%20Conversation%20The%20Futures%20of%20Governance.aspx>
- Kwa, B. (2015, 17 June). “100 per cent creative control” on new SG50 film: Royston Tan. *Yahoo! News*.
- Lambert, T. (Dir. & Prod.). (2006). *The history of Singapore* [Film]. Singapore: Discovery Channel.

- Lee, K. Y. (1998). *The Singapore story: Memoirs of Lee Kuan Yew*. Singapore: Times Edition.
- Lee, K. Y. (2000). *From third world to first: The Singapore story: 1965–2000: Memoirs of Lee Kuan Yew*. Singapore: Singapore Press Holdings.
- Lee, W. C. (1996). Chronology of a controversy. In S. Krishna et al. (Eds.), *Commentary: Looking at culture*. Retrieved from <http://www.biotechnics.org/Chronology%20of%20a%20controversy.htm>
- Lim, C. (1994, 3 September). The PAP and the people – A great affective divide. *The Straits Times* (Singapore). Retrieved from <http://catherinelim.sg/1994/09/03/the-pap-and-the-people-a-great-affective-divide/>
- Loh, K. S. (1998). Within the Singapore story: The use and narrative of history in Singapore. *Crossroads: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 12(2), 1–21.
- Low, D. (2014). The four myths of inequality in Singapore. In D. Low & S. Vadakeh (Eds.), *Hard choices: Challenging the Singapore consensus* (pp. 17–30). Singapore: NUS Press.
- Mesenan, C. (2014). *Dissident voices: Personalities in Singapore's political history*. Singapore: Marshall Cavendish.
- Mokhtar, F. (2014, 11 September). Tan Pin Pin's film *To Singapore, With Love* not to be shown in public. Channel NewsAsia. Retrieved from <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/tan-pin-pin-s-film-to/1355208.html>
- Ong, E. & Tim, M. H. (2014, July/August). Singapore's 2011 General Elections and beyond: Beating the PAP at its own game. *Asian Survey*, 54(4), 749–772.
- Ong, S. F. (2005, 22 August). Rain's man: Scream king. *The Straits Times* (Singapore), p. 4 (Life! section).
- Mok, C., Ang, M., & Tan, K. S. (2001). *Vision of persistence* [Film]. Singapore: Independent film.
- Peterson, W. (2001). *Theater and the politics of culture in contemporary Singapore*. Wesleyan University Press.
- PM Lee on declassified British documents: Revisionists “still deny historical facts”. (2014, 21 December). *The New Paper*.
- Poh, S. K., Tan, K. F., & Hong, L. (2013). *The 1963 Operation Coldstore in Singapore: Commemorating 50 Years*. Malaysia: Strategic Information and Research Development Centre & Pusat Sejarah Rakyat Bhd.
- Potts, J. & Cunningham, S. (2008). Four models of the creative industries. *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 14(3), 233–247.
- Ramakrishna, K. (2015). “Original sin”?: *Revisiting the revisionist critique of the 1963 Operation Coldstore in Singapore*. Singapore: ISEAS Publishing.
- Renaissance City Report*. (2000). Singapore: Ministry of Information & the Arts.
- Rodan, G. (2004). *Transparency and authoritarian rule in Southeast Asia: Singapore and Malaysia*. Oxford & New York: Routledge.
- Salleh, N. A. M. (2014, 13 June). Write way to mark nation's 50<sup>th</sup> birthday. *The Straits Times*.
- See, M. (2005). *Singapore rebel* [Film]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DHlu6Tt8bmk>
- See, M. (2006). *Zahari's 17 years* [Film]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IXnmN0ZcwOs&feature=youtu.be>
- Sharma, H. (Playwright), & Tan, A. (Dir.). (2008). *Gemuk girls* [Play]. Singapore: The Necessary Stage.
- Siew, S. (2009). Censorship Review Committee. *Singapore Infopedia*, National Library Board Singapore. Retrieved from [http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP\\_1571\\_2009-09-18.html](http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP_1571_2009-09-18.html)
- Tan, K. P. (2008). Meritocracy and elitism in a global city: Ideological shifts in Singapore. *International Political Science Review*, 29(1), 7–27.
- Tan, K. P. (2009). Who's afraid of Catherine Lim? The state in patriarchal Singapore. *Asian Studies Review*, 33(1), 43–62.
- Tan, K. P. (2012). Alternative vision in neoliberal Singapore: Memories, places, and voices in the films of Tan Pin Pin. In D. Lim & H. Yamamoto (Eds.), *Film in contemporary Southeast Asia: Cultural interpretation and social intervention* (pp. 147–167). Oxford: Routledge.
- Tan, K. P. (2013). Forum theater in Singapore: Resistance, containment, and commodification in an advanced industrial society. *positions: east asia cultures critique*, 21(1), 189–221.
- Tan, P. P. (Dir. & Prod.). (2013). *To Singapore, with love* [Film]. Singapore: Independent film.

- Tan, R. (Dir.), Tang, E. (Dir.), & Thng, V. (Dir.). (2010). *Old places* [Film]. Singapore: Chuan Pictures.
- Tan, R. (Dir.), Tang, E. (Dir.), & Thng, V. (Dir.). (2012). *Old romances* [Film]. Singapore: Chuan Pictures.
- Tan, R. (Dir.). (2003). *The old man and the river* [Film]. Singapore: Independent film.
- Teo, S. L. (2010). *Beyond the blue gate: Recollections of a political prisoner*. Singapore: Ethos Books.
- Teo, S. L. & Low, Y. L. (2012). *Escape from the lion's paw: Reflections of Singapore's political exiles*. Singapore: Function 8 Limited.
- Teo, X. (2009, 12 September). Ban on film lifted. *Today*.
- The History of Singapore*. (2006). Dir. & Prod. by Tim Lambert for Discovery Networks Asia. DVD distributed & marketed by Universal Music Singapore Ltd.
- Tong, K. (Dir.). (2011). *It's a great great world* [Film]. Singapore: Boku Films & Raintree Pictures.
- Wong, S. Y. (Playwright & Dir.), & Chng, S. T. (Playwright & Dir.). (2013). *Square moon* [Play]. Singapore: Function 8 Limited.
- Yao, S. (2007). *Singapore: The state and the culture of excess*. London: Routledge.

Copyright of Asian Studies Review is the property of Routledge and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.