

Is Yale a Reliable Partner for the National University of Singapore?

Michael Montesano

Yale's approach to its partnership with the National University of Singapore (NUS) to establish an undergraduate liberal arts college in the country is flawed and ill-conceived in ways that call into question Yale's ability to be a responsible long-term partner for Singapore and its national university. Yale's current leadership has pursued the project in so personalistic a fashion as to build no solid institutional foundation for it at Yale. That leadership continues to demonstrate no effective understanding of Singapore, even as it has alienated the distinguished specialists on Southeast Asia on Yale's faculty who could offer guidance. That leadership appears to censor itself and to pursue a wider regime of self-censorship at Yale in matters relating to the proposed Yale-NUS college. This regime cannot last; the dissatisfaction that it arouses will come to undermine Yale's ability to serve as NUS's partner. Efforts on the part of Yale's leadership to address concerns at Yale about academic freedom in Singapore have remained vague and evasive. That leadership has never explained clearly the role of a "national university" in a "late"-developing country like Singapore or the instrumental nature of academic freedom at such a university. Other aspects of that role suggest additional challenges that an effective partnership between Yale and NUS will face. The proposed partnership between Singapore and NUS has now caused a deep, bitter crisis of governance at Yale. The university now faces two choices: to withdraw from its partnership with NUS or radically to restructure its plans for participation in the proposed Yale-NUS college in Singapore.

I. A poorly informed, reckless, and "sultanistic" commitment.

Last August, during one of the current Yale president's eerily McNamara-esque flying visits from the Eastern Seaboard of the United States to a Southeast Asian country of whose history and day-to-day life he lacks all comprehension, I attended a reception in his honor for Yale alumni living in Singapore. The event began with some informal remarks from the president, heralding the great promise of the liberal arts college that Singapore's People's Action Party (PAP) government had hired Yale to help create on the Kent Ridge campus of the National University of Singapore. Early in those remarks, the president noted his regret that some of what had been said about this plan in New Haven might have caused "embarrassment" in Singapore. With breezy contempt, he indicated that criticism of the plan reflected the views

of only a small minority at Yale and that newspapers and their coverage need not be taken too seriously.

Already opposed to the plan for a “Yale-NUS College,” I nevertheless found in these remarks two further causes for real concern about the scheme.

First, I asked myself, did Yale’s president really understand Singapore so poorly as not to know that its PAP government has long brushed aside comments from weak and woolly Western liberals on all but two or three very specific aspects of its system of government? Could he really think that anyone in authority in Singapore had been embarrassed by the rather predictable criticisms voiced by members of the Yale faculty or printed in *The Yale Daily News*?

Second, I had to wonder, could Yale’s president, travelling with a number of members of the Yale faculty, honestly believe that his sneering reference to a free press would not get back to New Haven? Did he not understand that, when it did, his offer to enlist Yale as one more regiment of educational Hessians in the service of the PAP government would only face even sharper criticism?

NUS and the Singapore government had, I then realized, had the bad luck to tie themselves to a partner who was both exceedingly poorly informed and terribly reckless.

But the evening only grew more worrying. As Yale’s vice-president-*cum*-University-Secretary and I spoke by the buffet table some twenty minutes after the president finished his remarks, he walked over, and the vice president took the opportunity to introduce us. I told Yale’s president that I believed that his failure, as in his remarks that evening, to articulate any understanding of the Singaporean and Southeast Asian contexts in which Yale would help found this new college meant that what he said about the college and its promise to bring liberal arts education to “Asia” had no credibility. He replied, as the vice president listened, that having and articulating such an understanding were not his job. To my comment that he was in that case in way over his head in Singapore, he told me to “come back in five years” and see what the new college would by then have accomplished. My reply, one that mirrored the sentiments of various senior members of the Yale faculty with whom I had spoken over the course of the preceding year, was that it was likely to be a pretty mediocre operation. Now the president grew openly angry. Snarling that he had been involved in many undertakings in his life and that not one had been mediocre, he abruptly turned his back on me and strode off.

Unpleasant as this brutal display of the Yale president’s self-regard was, it was also quite useful. For it alerted me to a third cause for concern about the planned Yale-NUS college. Yale’s current president clearly had so much of his ego tied up in the scheme that he was

beyond having a serious, rational discussion about it with an informed critic. And, having served in his post since 1993, he could only be considered a short-timer. How could NUS and Singapore possibly count on Yale's next president to share its incumbent president's commitment to the new college, when that commitment had such an unmistakably personal rather than institutional nature? Perhaps Yale's Singaporean partners ought to bone up on the eminent Yale political scientist and sociologist Juan J. Linz's work on "sultanism" as they prepare to treat further with Yale and its current president. Perhaps, too, they ought to contemplate Professor Linz's theorizing on the aftermath of the demise of "sultanistic regimes" and its implications for the future of the Yale-NUS college.

II. Singapore: In Southeast Asia, or just "Asia"?

In September 2010, when Yale first formally announced that it was exploring the establishment of a liberal arts college at NUS, the Yale Office of International Affairs issued a five-page document entitled, "Yale and Singapore: Other Projects and Facts." In addition to listing internships, the number of Yale alumni in Singapore and of Singaporeans at Yale, workshops, summer courses, and various other connections between Yale and Singapore, the document noted that "Yale established its Southeast Asia Studies Program in 1947 – the first area studies program in the United States to embark on the study of Southeast Asia in all disciplines." Today, that program takes the form of a Council on Southeast Asia Studies, bringing together faculty from a range of departments.

Among the half-dozen most important Southeast Asianists to teach at Yale in the past sixty-five years was a Sudetenland-born Jew whose family saved him from the Holocaust by securing him a post in the Netherlands East Indies, today's Indonesia, in 1939. Following internment on Java by the Japanese, arrival in New Zealand as a refugee, and a Cornell doctorate, Harry J. Benda joined Yale's history department in 1959. Professor Benda died, too young, in 1971. His journal articles, collected in a Yale Southeast Asia Studies publication by the late, great Yale historian Robin Winks, remain to this day influential in shaping understandings of the interplay of past and present in this region.

And, while the staff of the Yale Office of International Affairs seems to have been unaware of it when they compiled the September 2010 document, it was in the career of Professor Benda that the most significant previous academic connection between Yale and Singapore came. In 1968 the father of the Singaporean technocracy, Dr Goh Keng Swee, selected Professor Benda to serve as the inaugural director of the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS) while on leave from Yale for a year. At the time of its foundation, ISEAS

embodied then newly independent Singapore's realization of the need to understand its neighbors. Dr Goh's appointment of Professor Benda, his confidence in Professor Benda's suitability for the post, was no casual matter; little about the PAP state's approach to government or institution-building is ever a casual matter.

Today, Harry J. Benda's portrait hangs in a place of honor in the ISEAS library, in the Institute's building adjacent to NUS's Kent Ridge campus. The Association for Asian Studies annually presents a prize named in Benda's memory for the best "first book" on Southeast Asia.¹ But neither Yale's current president nor any of those at Yale willing to work with him in creating the Yale-NUS college would appear ever to have publicly alluded to his place in Yale's history of academic relations with Singapore or to his relationship with Dr Goh, yet alone cited his invaluable work or durable insights on Southeast Asia, even as they plunge into a long-term involvement with this region.

Neither is it the case that Yale's leadership show any sign of drawing instead on the work of other serious scholars of Southeast Asia in an effort to understand Singapore and its region. Instead, as in a now notorious episode, Yale's president has displayed more familiarity with the much advertised Singapore Airlines than with scholarship that might help him understand in an intellectually credible way the historical, social, political, and economic contexts in which the Yale-NUS college will operate.²

At times, in fact, it has seemed that Yale's leadership remains in denial of the reality that Singapore is in fact in Southeast Asia. Yale's president appears to conceive of a place called "Asia," to which he will deliver the blessings of a liberal arts education in the form of a college sited in Singapore. Scholars in attendance at the Yale-NUS college reception during the annual meeting of the American Historical Association in Chicago this past January cringed as Yale's president witnessed his missionary impulse to bring education to this "Asia," as he slighted the calibre of NUS's extant offerings in the humanities and social sciences and its University Scholars Programme honors program, and as he repeatedly invoked "Asians." One of those present e-mailed me to say that it all sounded like something out of Kipling, that Yale's president could not possibly appreciate how foolish he sounded to the Asianists in the room, Singaporean and non-Singaporean alike.

Can NUS and Yale's new employers in the PAP government possibly deem reliable a partner that, so many months into their partnership, remained both so uncomprehending and so

¹ See <http://www.asian-studies.org/publications/book-prizes-benda.htm>.

² See <http://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2011/10/why-is-yale-outsourcing-a-campus-to-singapore/247463/#>.

uninterested in their country and its region? Hard to imagine. But the situation is still worse. For, in addition to this lack of comprehension and interest, one must note the alienation from the Yale administration's decision to sell Yale's services to Singapore of the members of Yale's Council on Southeast Asia Studies, of the Yale faculty who have actually devoted their lives to understanding the region and might bring their understanding to a Yale initiative in Southeast Asia.

Last August, Yale and NUS convened in New Haven a curriculum-planning event. NUS's president and vice-chancellor Tan Chorh Chuan attended, along with Yale's president. So did Southeast Asianists from Cornell and Berkeley, but not from Yale. It is impossible to know whether President Tan remembered Yale's boast of eleven months before about its legacy of and strength in the study of Southeast Asia and thus wondered why his new partners could not produce Yale's Southeast Asianists at this event. In fact, the members of Yale's Council on Southeast Asia Studies only learned about the event afterward. Their participation would have introduced a decidedly unwelcome element of dissent into the event. But Singapore has a duty to ask itself, how dependable a partner can Yale be, if its leadership cannot count on the assistance of the members of its faculty best prepared to guide it as it seeks to navigate the region?

III. The rot of self-censorship.

Liberally inclined Singaporeans have long viewed self-censorship as the scourge of the political system that has resulted from uninterrupted PAP rule since before their country's independence in 1965. Willingly or not, most Singaporeans and many foreigners resident in Singapore rely on internalized self-censorship as they go about their daily lives. This is a choice that they make. It is also a reality that may change as the history of this country unfolds.

As the Yale president's remarks on the press here last August suggest, however, the real concern raised by Yale's engagement with the PAP government and with NUS involves self-censorship at Yale rather than in Singapore.

In fact, a Yale news release of May 2011 led many Yale alumni in Singapore—both Americans and Singaporeans—to conclude that Yale was already practicing artful self-censorship.³ The release announced that a member of the Yale College Class of 1980, Charles W. (“Chip”) Goodyear, would join the governing Yale Corporation as a Successor Trustee. It detailed Mr Goodyear's record of generous and meaningful support for Yale and his career in

³ See <http://news.yale.edu/2011/05/10/two-alumni-appointed-successor-trustees-yale-corporation> .

finance and mining. It omitted, however, any mention of Mr Goodyear's relationship with Singapore. In early 2009 it was announced with great fanfare here that Mr Goodyear had been named CEO-Designate of Temasek Holdings, one of the PAP government's two well endowed sovereign wealth funds. He was due to take the reins at Temasek in October of that year. In July 2009, however, it was announced that an inability to agree on questions of corporate strategy had led Temasek and Mr Goodyear to the mutual decision to call this plan off and to part ways. The scale and prominence of Temasek meant that, in Singaporean, Asian, and indeed global financial circles, this was big news. It represented an undeniable loss of face for the PAP government, which has long taken pride in succession planning. And the omission of any mention of Mr Goodyear's brief employment with Temasek in Yale's May 2011 release led alumni here to chuckle knowingly and to remark to one another how quickly Yale's leadership had assimilated Singaporean norms of self-censorship.

Today, faculty at Yale report nervousness in the ranks about opposing plans for the Yale-NUS college openly, for fear of retribution. When, a year ago, I raised my own objection with one of Yale's recent "star hires" in the social sciences, he told me curtly that all to whom he had spoken had told him that this was a train that had already left the station. Translation: he was not commenting, and our conversation should move on to another topic.

Yale undergraduates have not been spared the pressure to censor themselves either. On one occasion in early 2011, Yale's president placed a call to *The Yale Daily News* to advise the author of an op-ed piece critical of his plans for Singapore to consider other perspectives on those plans in the future.

The problem, of course, is that the routinization at Yale of self-censorship on matters relating to Singapore will require substantial disruption of the intellectual life of the university. Over time, Yale faculty and students will find the need to censor themselves when writing of Singapore or of the Yale-NUS college impossible to abide. And there is another angle to all this, for, in its zeal to pursue its own version of the internationalization of the university, Yale's current leadership overlooks just how "international" Yale's intellectual life has long been. Recent developments in Singapore and their relationship to Yale are illustrative.

Singapore held polls for the country's largely ceremonial presidency last August. In the course of the unusually heated campaign, there was discussion of the arrest of more than twenty social activists and labor organizers, including many affiliated with the Catholic Church, in 1987 under the country's Internal Security Act (ISA). Typically referred to, following the PAP government's description of it, as "the Marxist conspiracy" but also sometimes called, following apparent Internal Security Department nomenclature, "Operation

Spectrum,” this episode is not often talked about in Singapore. But it remains controversial, and its impact on the Church here has been profound. Until the recent publication of the detention memoir of the now retired lawyer Teo Soh Lung, perhaps the most important book on the episode was Francis Seow’s *To Catch a Tartar: A Dissident in Lee Kuan Yew’s Prison*, published in 1994 in Yale’s own Southeast Asia publications series. The question that must be asked is whether, if in future such a manuscript comes to Yale’s Council on Southeast Asia Studies, its leadership will either feel obliged to or come under subtle pressure to decline to publish it, in order not to cause Singapore “embarrassment.” A pair of indicators suggest that such an outcome is not so far-fetched as it might appear.

First, just before Thanksgiving 2010, I contacted Yale’s much admired and loved Catholic chaplain, the head of the university’s long influential St Thomas More Catholic Center, by phone. My purpose was to suggest that, sooner or later in Yale’s relationship with NUS, Operation Spectrum and its difficult legacy would come to the attention of Yale Catholics and that it would be good to expose the community to it first. The chaplain listened to me carefully. He even asked whether Vincent Cheng, the seminarian-turned-social-worker who became the most high-profile detainee in the operation, was able to travel.⁴ I followed up by sending further information to the chaplain. But—puzzlingly? troublingly?—I heard no more from him until I contacted him a year later. At that time, following a brief response to an e-mail message, he again went silent. More recently, another Singaporean former seminarian who worked as a labor organizer here before deciding that it was best to leave the country reached out to the same Yale chaplain. He never heard back either. And it would seem that most Yale Catholics remain unaware of “the Marxist conspiracy” in Singapore.

Second, and chillingly, in early 2006 Yale’s current president caved in to pressure from the government of Thailand to allow representatives of the Thai monarchy, whose supporters would just months later mount a coup d’état in Bangkok, pre-publication review (just “for accuracy,” but they always say that, don’t they?) of a biography of the Thai king already in the process of publication by Yale University Press.⁵ While the late Yale law professor Alexander Bickel turned over in his grave, publication of the book was thus delayed long enough so that the world’s media had no access to it as they reported on the gala celebrations marking sixty years of the king’s reign in June 2006. This episode leaves little doubt about the impact, on Yale itself, of the current Yale president’s weak commitment to academic freedom where

⁴ See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D8ohOwc79Sc> and http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=37pv4rRWD7o&feature=watch_response .

⁵ See http://www.yalealumnimagazine.com/issues/2006_09/1_v.html.

Southeast Asia is concerned. Its implications for Yale scholarship relating to Singapore are clear and ominous. After all, Yale was not even employed by the government of Thailand when the episode occurred.

That this Thai episode elicited so little protest from Yale faculty was hard to understand. Nonetheless, it was in itself a one-time event. Should such episodes, or even the suspicion of them, become routine in matters concerning Singapore, however, the resultant regime of self-censorship in New Haven would surely prove unsustainable. It would poison both the relations of many of Yale's humanists and social scientists with Yale's leadership and the intellectual climate at the university. It would thus also undercut the ability of Yale, especially under the leadership of future Yale presidents, to serve as an effective partner of the PAP government and NUS.

There are two deep ironies here. The first is that, as I noted at the outset, Singapore's PAP government pays no heed to most criticisms levelled against it, whether by scholars at Singaporean or foreign institutions. It has long since concluded that only criticism of very particular kinds can do it damage. And it simply does not take most scholars in the humanities and social sciences seriously in any case; too many of them are liberals. Second, Singapore's regime of self-censorship is enforced through unspecified "OB markers" (with "OB" meaning "out of bounds"). Never knowing how far one can safely go in expressing oneself, Singaporeans learn to remain carefully short of where they think the line might be. They thus avoid even criticisms for which they would face no retribution. Yale's president and others at the university seem very quickly to have learned the same behaviour.

IV. Not how Singapore is different, but why it is.

Yale's current leadership has been maddeningly, even irresponsibly, vague in the case that it has made for both the merits of "a new model of residentially-based liberal education to serve all of Asia" (as Yale's president and provost put it in their September 2010 "Prospectus for a Liberal Arts College in Singapore"—a college that will, incidentally, enrol mostly Singaporeans) and for the merits of selling Yale's services to the PAP government. And it has also been difficult for many at Yale—troubled by this vagueness but far away from Singapore, unfamiliar with its history and politics, and lacking workaday experience of its universities—to translate a general, justified, and deep sense of unease about this undertaking into specific and effective criticism. They have focused on concern over the degree of academic freedom that faculty and students at the Yale-NUS college will enjoy. But they have thus overlooked a

more fundamental issue, an issue that casts serious doubt on the sustainability of any partnership between Yale on the one side and the PAP government and NUS on the other.

In 1994, *Foreign Affairs* published what has become a famous interview with Singapore's founding father Lee Kuan Yew, conducted by Fareed Zakaria. A member of the Yale College Class of 1986, Dr Zakaria is now a Successor Trustee of the Yale Corporation and an influential voice in deliberations on the "internationalization" of the university. Zakaria concludes the interview with "A Coda on Culture," the last lines of which read,

At the close of the interview, Lee handed me three pages. This was, he explained, to emphasize how alien Confucian culture is to the West. The pages were from the book *East Asia: Tradition and Transformation*, by John Fairbank, an American scholar.

"Culture"—"Confucian" or "Asian" or other—does not explain the markedly different institutional and academic context, with its very different norms, to that of New Haven, Connecticut, in which the Yale-NUS college will operate. History and of course politics do. But of particular value to any understanding of that context is the work of one of one of the Yale president's fellow economists, the late Odessa-born, Austrian-educated Harvard professor Alexander Gerschenkron.

To be an American in Singapore is to encounter a familiar exceptionalism. Of course, neither the United States nor Singapore is as exceptional as its citizens might think. And PAP Singapore conforms in all salient respects to some of the generalizations that Professor Gerschenkron made about "late"-developing economies and the ways in which they differed systematically from early developers—above all from the master-case of the first industrializer of them all, liberal England. Three of these generalizations have particular relevance in the present context. First, late developers make use of "the backlog of technological innovations" that they can borrow from earlier developers. Second, they apply "institutional instruments for which there is little or no counterpart" in earlier developers. Third, they feature a markedly different "intellectual climate."

Professor Gerschenkron was concerned above all with industrialization. But his generalizations apply equally to other sectors. They shed light on the entire trajectory of Singapore's astonishing economic growth under People's Action Party rule since 1959. And they explain the PAP government's general interest in and approach to the education sector and particular interest in and approach to the establishment of a liberal arts college on this island. This point merits brief elaboration.

The Yale-NUS college has been criticized on the grounds that it is not organic to Singapore or to Asia.⁶ But this criticism reveals a failure to understand how the late developer achieves rapid development, by adopting and adapting innovations and ways of doing things from earlier developers. The PAP government's determination to fill out its "educational portfolio" through the creation out of whole cloth of a liberal arts college here is classically Gershenkronian. But one must understand it in the context of Professor Gershenkron's other generalizations about late developers, too.

PAP Singapore has achieved what it has achieved through the use of institutional forms alien to liberal economic climates: the Housing and Development Board, which has built the flats in which some eighty percent of the country's population lives; the Jurong Town Corporation, which created to turn-key facilities on this island for foreign investors in the industrial sector; the National Trades Union Congress, whose leader sits in the PAP cabinet and which functions to keep the country strike-free; the Development Bank of Singapore, which originally served to channel finance into sectors of the economy deemed crucial to national progress; a range of state firms across numerous sectors, now corporatized and called "government-linked corporations"; the People's Action Party, a vanguard party with a small cadre membership whose secretary-general serves as prime minister; the People's Association, devoted to the promotion of "racial harmony and social cohesion" in Singapore; Temasek Holdings and the Government Investment Corporation of Singapore, two sovereign wealth funds; and many, many other institutions that Professor Gershenkron would have found so predictable . . . including the National University of Singapore.⁷

Professor Edwin Lee's history of "nation-building" in Singapore devotes a number of valuable chapters to the tertiary education sector. (Professor Lee is a former head of the NUS history department and a student of the late O. W. Wolters, yet another thinker with whose perspectives on Southeast Asia's current leadership and those members of the Yale faculty who have joined it in advancing its Singapore plans would do very well to acquaint themselves.) His book makes clear that, from soon after Singapore's independence in 1965, the PAP government viewed the University of Singapore—as NUS was called until the Chinese-medium Nanyang University was merged into it in 1980—as an arm of a state focused on national development. Little illustrates this reality so starkly as the government's decision

⁶ See <http://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2011/10/why-is-yale-outsourcing-a-campus-to-singapore/247463/#>.

⁷ Even a cursory reading of the collected speeches and writings—many touching on higher education—of the brilliant and inexhaustible Dr Goh Keng Swee, the creator of many of the institutions central to PAP Singapore's success as a "late" developer, immerses one in a thoroughly Gershenkronian world.

to send then Deputy Prime Minister Dr Toh Chin Chye to serve as the university's vice chancellor during 1968-1975. While no longer serving as deputy prime minister during this period, Dr Toh did remain a member of the cabinet and chairman of the PAP. Both before and during Dr Toh's tenure as vice chancellor of the University of Singapore, leading lights of the PAP government (including then Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew himself) and of the university's faculty debated the bases of academic freedom at a *national university* and the degree of autonomy deserved by such a university with a sophistication sadly missing from current debates on the issue.

What the course of these debates made clear was that PAP Singapore's national university was not to be a university in the way that the term has ever been understood at Yale. Here it is useful to recall Professor Gerchenkron's point about late developers' adoption of "institutional instruments for which there is little or no counterpart" in the liberal settings of the early developers. Neither has NUS's situation changed significantly since the early years of Singapore's independence. Professor Lee notes the continued status of NUS as "a university geared to the brain-power needs of the nation . . . in the knowledge and information driven economy of the present" and "the close nexus between the university and the government." It is in this light that one must appreciate NUS's emphasis on the same sorts of quantitative measures—publications in "top" journals, university rankings—that one might associate with the measurement of economic growth. And so one must also understand the focus of its Asia Research Institute on migration and the family, urbanism, science and society, and religion and globalization—all concerns of the PAP government. Similarly, and as the University of Wisconsin geographer and specialist on the globalization of higher education Professor Kris Olds has written, the emergence of Singapore as a "global schoolhouse" or as the "Boston of the East" is a PAP government undertaking, one reflective of planning about the next stage in Singapore's national development.⁸ The proposed Yale-NUS college can only be understood with reference to Professor Olds's writings on this subject.

For institutions of the sort that PAP Singapore developed in order to achieve its astonishing record of economic growth to function as they have done, Professor Gerschenkron's third generalization needed to obtain. The "intellectual climate" of Singapore, like that of virtually every successful "late" developer before it, has been illiberal. So, too, have its political, social, and intellectual orders. When the chairman of the governing board of

⁸ See, most recently, <http://globalhighered.wordpress.com/2012/03/31/deterritorializing-academic-freedom/>.

the proposed Yale-NUS college recently declined to label the education that it would offer “liberal,” some Yale alumni were nonplussed.⁹ But the chairman’s remarks reflected a canny understanding of the context in which the college was to operate. “Liberal” is a term of derision in the official lexicon of PAP Singapore. This derision has its roots in a conviction that liberals were too weak to lead Singapore through the challenges of its early history, that they remain too weak to take the hard decisions necessary to ensure the country’s continued prosperity.

On one level, there is nothing objectionable to all this. Singapore and Singaporeans have charted the course of their own history. It is not for foreigners to intervene in their affairs. What is objectionable is the failure of Yale’s current leadership perhaps to understand and certainly to be frank and honest about what it has got Yale involved in. Yale’s leadership can talk, breezily and foolishly, about bringing a new model of the liberal arts college to “Asia” all that it wants. But to be credible, it must acknowledge that Yale has sold its services—and, some would emphasize, its name—to a PAP Singapore focused on further developing its economy by becoming an education hub. The Yale-NUS college is one component of this effort, and to see it in any other light is to betray a sorry failure to understand Singapore.

Yale and NUS are both “universities.” But they are not institutions of a “counterpart” nature. For all of the surface similarities between Yale and NUS, the term “university” has two fundamentally different meanings as applied to the two institutions. Recognition of this reality, and of the import and purpose of the Yale-NUS college in late-developing Singapore, has at least four direct implications, implications that Yale’s current leadership and its fast-dwindling band of allies on the Yale faculty should long since have made explicit.

The first of these relates to the question of academic freedom, which has caused so much concern at Yale. In a sense, this question has been misspecified from the start. Stake-holders in liberal institutions view academic freedom as an unquestioned value, as a central feature of the enterprise. But in the illiberal institutional context of the late developer, freedom—academic or otherwise—has a purely instrumental function. Scholars in this illiberal context may range freely within their disciplines, as the advancement of those disciplines and the publication of work in those disciplines contribute to the purpose of that which is called “the university” and thus to national development. But that freedom has no value in its own right, and disciplines and expertise may be demarcated in ways that restrict scholars to what is in effect a spacious and exceedingly well appointed academic pen. Research and publication

⁹ See <http://www.yalealumnimagazine.com/blog/?p=12260>.

within the confines of this pen will rarely require any *direct* intervention to curtail freedom of expression. But confines are nevertheless confines, and those in question are not necessarily determined with reference to the concerns of scholarship.

Second, individuals charged with building and leading institutions in the illiberal context of late development know what they want, and they play to win. The embarrassingly long interval between September 2010 and March 2011 during which Yale and the PAP government worked to hammer out an agreement on the planned college made these truths manifest. While a close confidant of its president lamented that Yale had “no leverage” in its negotiations with Singapore, there was at the same time exasperation among NUS administrators over Yale’s failure to understand Singapore, its needs, and its constraints. The Singapore side knew, that is, what it was after. The Yale side could not be sure what it itself wanted. One senior faculty member at Yale remarked, “Rick [as Yale’s president is commonly called] wants to do something big internationally, but he does not have the money.” So he would have Singapore pay for this “something big” before concluding his long, long presidency of Yale. Others felt that the president was bored with New Haven and sought ways to have his job take him elsewhere. Perceptive observers in Singapore and elsewhere wondered whether Yale feared being left behind in an Asia-centric twenty-first century if it remained focused on New Haven and whether it saw tying up with NUS as a ready-made answer to those fears. Neither is it clear that, in the period since March 2011, Yale has put behind it what the rugged men and women of a late developer would view as the weak and indecisive conduct of the liberal. In the humanities and social sciences, Yale’s approach to faculty recruitment for the planned college has left the distinct impression that it has very little idea what it is doing.

Third, there are some areas in which squaring the circle in any partnership between Yale and a national university conceived of as is NUS will prove simply impossible. These areas include legislation infringing on the rights of homosexuals in Singapore, its PAP government’s regime of labor control, and the state’s prerogative to monitor the activities of societies, including those operating on university campuses. Neither Yale’s incumbent president nor any of the successors to whom he bequeaths such an unsustainable partnership will be in any position to ask Singapore to take that legislation off its books, to introduce a legally enforceable minimum wage or the right of collective bargaining for the foreign workers and elderly Singaporeans who will clean the precincts of the Yale-NUS college, or to promise that student societies affiliated with the college will not be monitored by outside authorities. Yet Yale’s current leadership and its successors will find their relations with Yale’s gay faculty and students, with faculty and students who respect gay rights, with Yale’s unions, and with student

organizations in New Haven that seek out relationships with societies organized under the auspices of the Yale-NUS college difficult if not impossible. (One notes with some surprise that one voice not yet heard in the debate over Yale's plans for Singapore is that of the Yale College alumnus and legendary New Haven labor leader John Wilhelm.)

Finally, in 1994 the Singaporean novelist and intellectual Catherine Lim wrote that "a great affective divide" existed between Singapore's People's Action Party and the people of Singapore. Rebuked by the prime minister of the day for involving herself in politics without running for office, she had nevertheless put her finger on an important aspect of the institutions of late developers. The PAP, ever focused on renewal, has since that time sought to bridge the divide that Ms Lim recognized. Yale is, however, moving in the opposite direction as a result of its bungling and poorly explained effort to work with an institution of a fundamentally different nature to Yale's. Its leadership has opened a great affective divide between many members of the Yale faculty and their former colleague who happens now to be the university's president and between the supporters of his Singapore plan and the sceptics. In recent weeks, efforts on the part of Yale's current leadership and its supporters to overcome these sceptics have taken on a particularly poisonous character.

VI. Yale's Great Singapore Folly: What is to be done?

Yale's Great Singapore Folly raises a fundamental question in the realm of university governance: ought institutions of higher education be held to the same standards of intellectual seriousness to which their faculty hold both one another and their students as these institutions venture out into the world? If the answer to this question is "yes," then Yale and its current leadership have failed to meet any reasonable standard. In fact, that leadership seems not even to have tried. It seems to believe, that is, that the answer to this question is "no." Too, its irresponsible attitude appears to have seeped downward to the Yale administrators and faculty assisting Yale's leadership in this project. Others, thankfully, believe that the answer to this question is indeed "yes." This group includes not merely members of the Yale faculty, but also Yale alumni with international experience, not least in various parts of Asia, who have begun to fear a deep leadership crisis at Yale. This includes moneyed alumni.

The flawed, ill-conceived, and "sultanistic" approach taken by Yale's incumbent president in putting Yale in the employ of Singapore's PAP government to establish a liberal arts college in partnership with the National University of Singapore means that Yale cannot be a reliable partner for NUS on a sustained basis. This much is manifest. Before it sinks even

deeper into its quagmire on Kent Ridge, with consequences destructive to Yale and unfair both to its Singaporean paymasters and to NUS, Yale has two alternatives.

The first alternative is for the Yale Corporation to meet, to examine the university's contract with the PAP government, to consult its lawyers, and to terminate its partnership with NUS before the mess that Yale's current leadership has made does any more damage to Yale. In the short run, this decision will cause Yale considerable embarrassment, but folly has its price. Giving Yale's incumbent president a Kissingerian "decent interval" at Yale's helm, the Corporation can hand effective management of Yale over to others and launch a search for Yale's nineteenth president. A central goal of that search will be to select an intellectual committed to liberal values and to sincere collegiality and marked by the perspective and judgement to conceive of and forge responsible, durable, and fruitful academic partnerships around the globe for Yale. (Monoglots need not apply.) These will have to be partnerships whose terms are consonant with principles of sound university governance and whose rationales can stand up to the scrutiny of a community of scholars. This decision will leave in the lurch many in Singapore who have worked faithfully and hard on the Yale-NUS college. But late developers are tough and resourceful. PAP Singapore has overcome set-backs before. It will, before long, put this set-back behind it in like manner.

The second alternative is more complicated. Its purpose is, in essence, to "save" Yale's relationship with Singapore by taking a range of concrete steps to enable Yale to be a reliable partner to the PAP government and to NUS over the long run. These steps must include, but are not limited to, the following.

1. A figure in Yale leadership must deliver a major public address at Yale on Yale and Singapore. This address must offer a compelling, credible, and serious vision of Singapore and Southeast Asia, of their histories, and of the complex and dynamic societies in this part of the world with which Yale will now engage. It must transcend the defensiveness that has marked Yale's stated justifications of the Yale-NUS college to present a detailed, intellectually substantive case for establishing a liberal arts college in Southeast Asia, siting that college in Singapore, and allowing a foreign government to finance it. This address must honor liberal principles and demonstrate the respect for the intelligence of stake-holders—Yale faculty, Yale alumni, and, not least, Yale's prospective partners in the PAP government and at NUS and the wider tax-paying Singapore public—that has all too often been missing in Yale's public statements on the Yale-NUS college. In his treatment of the Yale faculty and in his prolonged failure to articulate a serious rationale for the Yale-NUS college, Yale's president has long since disqualified himself from giving any such address. Perhaps Yale's much respected

provost, the dean of Yale College, or a member of the Yale Corporation can be tasked to prepare and deliver this address on Yale's behalf.

2. Yale must make public the documents setting out all terms agreed upon by Yale and the PAP government, any of its ministries and departments, statutory boards, NUS, sovereign wealth funds, or government-linked corporations. This includes not only terms relating to academic freedom at the planned college but also terms relating to governance of the college, to the funding of the college, and to compensation to be paid to Yale, to its Officers, or to any of its other personnel.

3. In order to avoid even the appearance of conflicts of interest at Yale, Yale must make public the full record of all payments for consulting and other services, all research funding, and any complimentary plane tickets and hotel accommodation rendered to any Officer of Yale University or member of the Yale Corporation during the past fifteen years by any Singaporean government ministry or department, statutory board, university, sovereign wealth fund, government-linked corporation, or putatively independent organization financed primarily by the PAP government. The tardy statement, clearly drafted with excruciatingly hair-splitting care by Yale's lawyers, on the financial ties of three current or former fellows of the Yale Corporation released by the university on 1 April—which must have been a pretty panicky Sunday—is not adequate.¹⁰

4. Yale must replace four of its appointees to the ten-member Yale-NUS College Governing Board.¹¹ Members to be replaced are Yale's president; Vassar College president Catherine Bond Hill, a Yale-trained economist whose significant international experience was in Zambia (a reality that has left many Singaporeans made aware of it both dumb-founded and offended); and Roland Betts and George W. Bush's ambassador to China Clark Randt, two

¹⁰ It needs to be acknowledged that this requirement will in all likelihood force Mr Charles Goodyear to resign from the Yale Corporation, as his ability to reveal the financial terms under which he left Temasek Holdings may well be constrained. Mr Goodyear was for some years a senior executive of the holding company for Freeport McMoRan Copper & Gold, a firm with historic ties to Yale alumni that was closely associated with the late General Suharto's New Order dictatorship in Indonesia. He is, thus, perhaps the only individual in a leadership position at Yale who understands how the rough, serious Southeast Asian game is played. He is a focused, bright, personable man who also, that is, knows where the bodies are buried in this part of the world. For Yale, his resignation from the Corporation would be a real blow. For Yale's president Richard C. Levin, however, it would bring a certain poetic justice, for he has acknowledged that his project in Singapore is very much related to fundamental issues of university governance; see <http://www.yaledailynews.com/news/2012/feb/20/cancelled-faculty-meeting-reinstated-following/>. (It should also be noted that, a week or so ago, I tested this need for transparency regarding previous financial ties to Singaporean entities with two Singaporeans whose sharp critical faculties testify to their fine educations in NUS's Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. Their understanding of Singapore Inc. led them to consider the need obvious and logical.)

¹¹ See <http://news.yale.edu/2011/11/21/yale-nus-college-announces-governing-board> and <http://news.yale.edu/2011/11/21/yale-nus-college-governing-board-biographies>.

plutocratic alumni of Yale College with no record of involvement in Southeast Asia or in education in this region.

Already a member of the governing board, Yale's University Secretary and vice president—a real listener who is exceptionally well informed in the field of international education—can easily shoulder its president's duties as a member of the board. The loss of Messrs Betts and Randt may have an impact on the governing board's ability to raise funds for the new college, but early indications are that NUS can do so quite effectively with Yale's name alone.

The replacements for these four Yale appointees to the Yale-NUS College Governing Board ought to include, first, two members of the Yale College faculty chosen for fixed terms through a transparent process and, second, two individuals with Yale affiliations and demonstrated understandings of Singapore and Southeast Asia and their educational contexts. And—what a thought!—these appointees might even include a Singaporean or two not selected by the PAP government or by NUS. It is not clear, in fact, why Yale has filled none of its slots on the proposed college's governing board with Singaporeans or other Southeast Asians. Lack of imagination or of effort offers one likely explanation. Ignorance of Singapore and Southeast Asia among Yale's leadership may have left it unaware that the university counts among its alumni, for example,

--a Singaporean on the faculty of a major American business school, who also earned a degree at Cambridge, taught at America's finest liberal arts college (Swarthmore), pioneered the study of Singapore's industrialization strategy, is a leading scholar of Southeast Asian business, and in 2004 co-authored the opinion piece in *The Straits Times* that originally advocated the establishment of a liberal arts college in this country;

--a former Philippine Secretary of Education, former university president, former head of the secretariat of the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization, doctoral student of Harry Benda's, and visionary advocate of accessible tertiary education in Southeast Asia who studied five decades ago at the Ateneo de Manila University when it already offered an undergraduate program in liberal arts in Asia;

--an influential Malaysian alumnus of Yale College who has served as the United Nations' first Assistant Secretary-General for Economic Development, taught briefly at Yale and for many years at NUS's sister

institution the University of Malaya, and has published and edited dozens of books in the field of political economy;

--and Singapore's leading legal and constitutional historian, holder of a Yale Law JSD, author of a landmark biography of Singapore's first, liberal chief minister, and hugely active and effective former president of the Singapore Heritage Society.

These are but four possibilities for appointment to the governing board of the proposed Yale-NUS college. There are many, many others. The point, simply, is to see Yale represented on the board of the Yale-NUS college by men and women who understand the context in which the college will operate and who know what they are doing. Only thus can Yale be a reliable partner for NUS.

5. Yale must establish on a site as close as feasible to NUS's Kent Ridge campus a completely Yale-funded (no PAP-government-subsidized rent, either) research center with a director drawn from the Yale faculty on a two- or three-year term. This director will serve during his or her term as a member of the faculty of the Yale-NUS college with a reduced course-load, but Yale will pay her or his salary. The center will coordinate the activities and research of Yale faculty and graduate or professional students from all schools of the university, and of Yale College undergraduates, relating to Southeast Asia and to the region's place in the broader Asian and global contexts. It will serve as an outpost of genuine Yale in the region and an always open window on the Yale-NUS college. It will serve as an arena for contact between Yale faculty and students on the one hand and Singaporean and Southeast Asian scholars and intellectuals not introduced to Yale by NUS administrators on the other. Finally, this research center will help give Yale and its faculty the stake in Singapore and Southeast Asia without which the university cannot be NUS's reliable partner over the long term. As for its funding, well, rather than raising money for the Yale-NUS college, Messrs Betts and Randt can devote themselves to fund-raising on this new center's behalf and to recruiting other Yale alumni to helping them. Perhaps the new center could be named for one of the eminent Southeast Asianists whose tenure at Yale have epitomized its historical seriousness about the region.

Singapore, 3 April 2012

A long-time resident of Singapore and a Southeast Asia specialist, Michael Montesano was a member of the Yale College Class of 1983. He taught in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences of the National University of Singapore during 1999-2008 and was in 2009 an

inaugural recipient of the NUS Alumni Advisory Board's Inspiring Mentor Award. E-mail: michael.montesano@gmail.com .

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