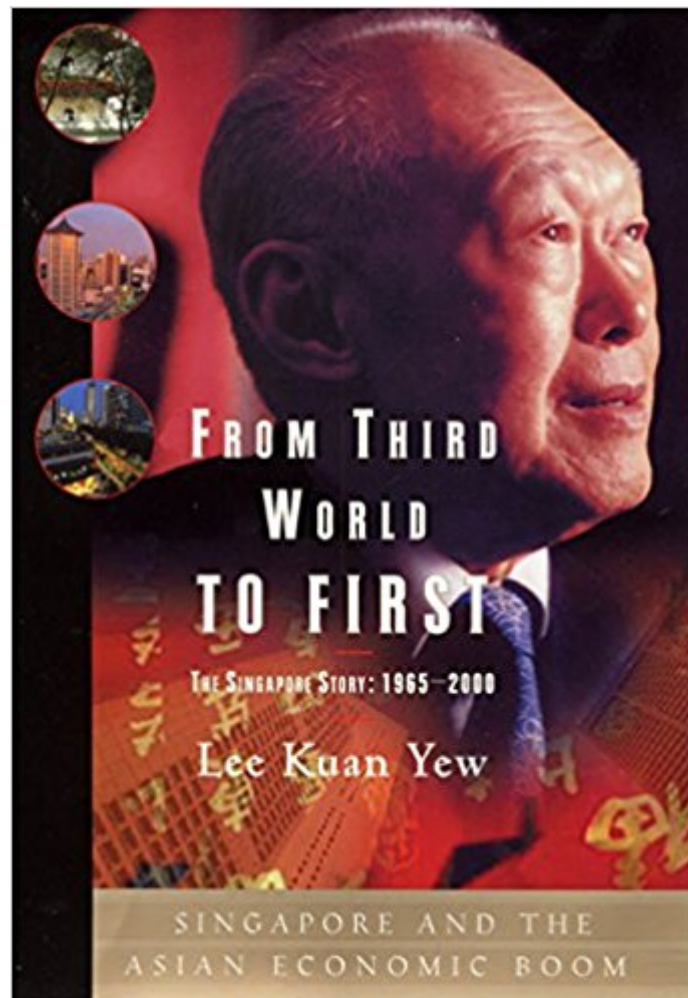




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# From Third World To First: The Singapore Story - 1965-2000



## Synopsis

Few gave tiny Singapore much chance of survival when it was granted independence in 1965. How is it, then, that today the former British colonial trading post is a thriving Asian metropolis with not only the world's number one airline, best airport, and busiest port of trade, but also the world's fourth-highest per capita real income? The story of that transformation is told here by Singapore's charismatic, controversial founding father, Lee Kuan Yew. Rising from a legacy of divisive colonialism, the devastation of the Second World War, and general poverty and disorder following the withdrawal of foreign forces, Singapore now is hailed as a city of the future. This miraculous history is dramatically recounted by the man who not only lived through it all but who fearlessly forged ahead and brought about most of these changes. Delving deep into his own meticulous notes, as well as previously unpublished government papers and official records, Lee details the extraordinary efforts it took for an island city-state in Southeast Asia to survive at that time. Lee explains how he and his cabinet colleagues finished off the communist threat to the fledgling state's security and began the arduous process of nation building: forging basic infrastructural roads through a land that still consisted primarily of swamps, creating an army from a hitherto racially and ideologically divided population, stamping out the last vestiges of colonial-era corruption, providing mass public housing, and establishing a national airline and airport. In this illuminating account, Lee writes frankly about his trenchant approach to political opponents and his often unorthodox views on human rights, democracy, and inherited intelligence, aiming always "to be correct, not politically correct." Nothing in Singapore escaped his watchful eye: whether choosing shrubs for the greening of the country, restoring the romance of the historic Raffles Hotel, or openly, unabashedly persuading young men to marry women as well educated as themselves. Today's safe, tidy Singapore bears Lee's unmistakable stamp, for which he is unapologetic: "If this is a nanny state, I am proud to have fostered one." Though Lee's domestic canvas in Singapore was small, his vigor and talent assured him a larger place in world affairs. With inimitable style, he brings history to life with cogent analyses of some of the greatest strategic issues of recent times and reveals how, over the years, he navigated the shifting tides of relations among America, China, and Taiwan, acting as confidant, sounding board, and messenger for them. He also includes candid, sometimes acerbic pen portraits of his political peers, including the indomitable Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, the poetry-spouting Jiang Zemin, and ideologues George Bush and Deng Xiaoping. Lee also lifts the veil on his family life and writes tenderly of his wife and stalwart partner, Kwa Geok Choo, and of their pride in their three children—particularly the eldest son, Hsien Loong, who is now Singapore's deputy prime

minister. For more than three decades, Lee Kuan Yew has been praised and vilified in equal measure, and he has established himself as a force impossible to ignore in Asian and international politics. *From Third World to First* offers readers a compelling glimpse into this visionary's heart, soul, and mind.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In this memoir, the man most responsible for Singapore's astonishing transformation from colonial backwater to economic powerhouse describes how he did it over the last four decades. It's a dramatic story, and Lee Kuan Yew has much to brag about. To take a single example: Singapore had a per-capita GDP of just \$400 when he became prime minister in 1959. When he left office in 1990, it was \$12,200 and rising. (At the time of this book's writing, it was \$22,000.) Much of this was accomplished through a unique mix of economic freedom and social control. Lee encouraged entrepreneurship, but also cracked down on liberties that most people in the West take for granted--chewing gum, for instance. It's banned in Singapore because of "the problems caused by spent chewing gum inserted into keyholes and mailboxes and on elevator buttons." If American politicians were to propose such a thing, they'd undoubtedly be run out of office. Lee, however, defends this and similar moves, such as strong antismoking laws and antispitting campaigns: "We would have been a grosser, ruder, cruder society had we not made these efforts to persuade people to change their ways.... It has made Singapore a more pleasant place to live in. If this is a 'nanny state,' I am proud to have fostered one." Lee also describes one of his most controversial proposals: tax breaks and schooling incentives to encourage educated men and women to marry

each other and have children. "Our best women were not reproducing themselves because men who were their educational equals did not want to marry them.... This lopsided marriage and procreation pattern could not be allowed to remain unmentioned and unchecked," writes Lee. Most of the book, however, is a chronicle of how Lee helped create so much material prosperity. Anticommunism is a strong theme throughout, and Lee comments broadly on international politics. He is cautiously friendly toward the United States, chastising it for a "dogmatic and evangelical" foreign policy that scolds other countries for human-rights violations, except when they interfere with American interests, "as in the oil-rich Arabian peninsula." Even so, he writes, "the United States is still the most benign of all the great powers.... [and] all noncommunist countries in East Asia prefer America to be the dominant weight in the power balance of the region." *From Third World to First* is not the most gripping book imaginable, but it is a vital document about a fascinating place in a time of profound transition. --John J. Miller

Yew is not an endearing figure. He is arrogant, self-righteous, and seems unduly sensitive to criticism by "outsiders" of Singapore's record on human rights. Despite occasional efforts to hide his less-than-pleasant characteristics, they often burst through in his long and often fascinating account of the dramatic transformation of this island nation into a stable and prosperous society. As prime minister for more than three decades, Yew certainly merits credit for Singapore's emergence, and there is much to be learned from his version of his stewardship. This is a detailed and sometimes difficult read, particularly if one lacks a strong grounding in macroeconomics. Still, his description of the difficulties of nation building in a multiethnic society has great value; his efforts to mesh Western concepts of free enterprise with Third World traditions of a "guided economy" may not have universal applicability, but they deserve close scrutiny. This is an essential contribution in efforts to understand why some societies seem so successful in becoming important players in the global economy. Jay Freeman Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved

It's a very engaging book. Mr. Lee Kuan Yew had a lot of wise sayings and he was so predictable. He had very good foresight and events indeed happened according to his words. He meant what he said and was able to transform a tiny island into one of the world's busiest nation within a short span of time. Very few political leaders would be able to achieve that. LKY had made Singaporeans a product of Singapore. Once I pick up the book to read, it's hard to put it down.

Mr. Yew had a vision and put it into place. With only three square miles Mr. Yew led his nation into

the modern era by using education and giving it's citizens a sense of of themselves in knowing that freedom can be achieved through staying single minded in purpose. How Mr. Yew handled the myriad is problems, especially the hateful communists, was just brilliant!

This is a must read for anyone interested in leadership strategies. Lee Kuan Yew's book provided insight into how as a formidable leader he took a few Chinese emigrants from an impoverished piece of real estate and developed a first world economy. His engaging memoirs discuss his efforts to reshape Singapore, integrating information technology into the country's business, government, homes and educational infrastructures. He was one of the most brilliant leaders to have ever arrived on the pages of history.

FANTASTIC read about what it really means to shape and lead a nation, warts and all. Lee Kuan Yew may have made some choices that were controversial, even bordering on questionable. But after visiting Singapore a few years ago and seeing the results of his work, I can't help but think he got it right.

An amazing book by an amazing man who did fantastic things for his country. This book is the ultimate way to get Yew's perspective on the events of the 1965-2000 Singapore. That it is his perspective and his only is also it's biggest caveat, but something you have to expect from every autobiography. A huge number of insights in this book for those who read it critically.

Very good Book for people interested in goverment, public policy and the history of Singapore. Lee Kuan Yew is one of the smartest politicians in the history of the world.

If we could just have five of these people running the entire world, peace and happiness would be achievable. It's a pretty hefty volume but do not be deterred, you can skim over sections of it and just focus on the parts that are applicable everywhere. His observations about human society are thought provoking and brilliant.

it was a little pricey because it is hardbound ... but they did not have it in paperback yet.

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