

OPENING REMARKS
BY MR CHOI SHING KWOK, DIRECTOR ISEAS – YUSOF ISHAK INSTITUTE
AT THE LAUNCH OF THE TEMASEK HISTORY RESEARCH CENTRE
ON 2 AUGUST 2019, 3PM, ISEAS-YUSOF ISHAK INSTITUTE

Prof Wang Gungwu, Chair of the ISEAS Board of Trustees,
Mr Lim Hock Chuan, Chief Executive of Temasek Foundation Connects,
Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

1. First, let me extend one & all a very warm welcome to the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute and thank you for coming to the launch of the Temasek History Research Centre.
2. The Temasek History Research Centre succeeds the Nalanda-Sriwijaya Centre (or NSC). NSC was established ten years ago in 2009 with support from then Minister for Foreign Affairs, George Yeo, and the late President SR Nathan. NSC's mission was to research into premodern maritime trade networks between South Asian, East Asian, and Southeast Asia. It was intended to complement the re-birth of one of the world's oldest centres of learning – Nalanda University in Bihar, India.
3. In the last ten years, NSC has had the privilege of hosting over 40 visiting researchers; organised over 40 international conferences and workshops; and over 165 seminars. It has also published over 30 original manuscripts from NSC researchers and international scholars, as well as conducted six archaeological Field Schools.
4. Unfortunately, with funding commitments to NSC coming to an end, the NSC has had to cease its activities, but we were determined that this would not spell the end of historical research at ISEAS. Instead, we took it as an opportunity to review, rethink, and repurpose NSC into something new.

5. NSC's ten years of existence has left us with many valuable assets. First, we have built up an extensive network of historians and archaeologists who are recognised internationally as experts on premodern Southeast Asia. Second, we have also developed strong Field School expertise and warm relations with our archaeological counterparts in the region through our expeditions in Cambodia and Indonesia. It would have been a pity to let this network and expertise go to waste with the closure of NSC.
6. Instead, ISEAS decided to set up a Centre that was sharper in focus and had more salience with the institute's ready audience and stakeholders. While NSC's previous research scope spanned South and East Asia, we decided that the new Centre would look at premodern Singapore and its links to her immediate region. The new Centre will also continue to conduct Field Schools for Singaporean students in order to deepen their appreciation for the history and civilisations that dominated the ASEAN region in ancient times.
7. As those of you who are familiar with Singapore's premodern history know, there are many gaps in our knowledge and understanding of that period. We may be familiar with the legend of the Palembang Prince Sri Tri Buana; the existence of Temasek as a 14th century trading port; and much later, Singapore's importance to the Johor-Riau Sultanate. However, there is so much more that we do not know. What happen to Temasek with the rise of the Majapahit empire? How did it fare under the Malacca Sultanate? What kind of communities were living on the island, and how did they trade and network with the region? We hope that the new Centre will be able to provide some answers to such questions in time to come.

8. It is thus appropriate that the Temasek History Research Centre is set up in our Bicentennial year. While the Bicentennial Commemorations mark the 200th anniversary of Sir Stamford Raffles' arrival in Singapore, our history goes much further back than 1819. The Temasek History Research Centre will seek to attract scholars to ISEAS to deepen our understanding of Temasek and the different economic and political roles it played through the centuries. Just as important, we hope the new Centre will deepen our appreciation for Singapore's links to its immediate region. Such appreciation is needed to understand that Singapore did not exist in a vacuum but as a vital part of a rich ecosphere of communities and resources.
9. It will build on recent work done by historians to understand such ties and networks in the region. One example is the edited volume by Kwa Chong Guan and Peter Borschberg entitled *Studying Singapore Before 1800*, published last year. Another more recent example is the volume entitled *Seven Hundred Years: A History of Singapore*, edited by Kwa Chong Guan, Derek Heng, Peter Borschberg and Tan Tai Yong, published just a few months ago. These publications suggest that there is still much to discover and understand about premodern Singapore.
10. The new Centre hopes to contribute to this body of work by offering the opportunities for scholars in disciplines such as history, archaeology, linguistics, cultural anthropology, and others to conduct research and field work.
11. As with all ventures, this Centre would not have been possible without strong partners and committed stakeholders. I thank Prof Wang for agreeing to be the Guest-of-Honour at this launch. I am grateful to the Temasek Foundation, represented here by Mr Lim Hock Chuan, for generously supporting the establishment of the Temasek History Research Centre. When we first approached Temasek Foundation with the idea for the new Centre, we found them to be enthusiastic collaborators, eager to support and promote research into our past.
12. Please join me in wishing the Temasek History Research Centre every success in uncovering our past and benefitting the future. Thank you.