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对新加坡长时段历史的探索与借鉴

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对新加坡长时段历史的探索与借鉴

为期一年的莱佛士登陆200周年纪念活动，也为回顾更遥远的过去提供了一个契机。它让我们能共同努力追溯新加坡的700年历史，这比英国殖民主义者于1819年到来前早了500年。另一方面，我们可以从新加坡过去700年的长期命运中汲取哪些教训呢？

受制于东印度公司的莱佛士向柔佛苏丹王朝租用新加坡，是新加坡历史的转折点。英国人的到来，为这个小岛的经济、物质和社会带来天翻地覆的转变，并一直持续到今天。直到最近，新加坡的历史始于1819年仍为主流叙事。

民族国家往往试图将自己的历史追溯到辉煌的过去，或证明自己的历史更为悠久。新加坡也不例外。开埠200周年纪念活动突出表明，新加坡不仅是一个拥有53年独立历史的社会政治和经济实体，而且是一个有着700年历史的国家。

对于像费尔南·布罗代尔（Fernand Braudel，1902年—1985年）这样的历史学家来说，“长时段”（longue durée）是一种以很长一段时间内，不知不觉发生的所有现象为重点的历史书写。它强调人与世界之间不断变化的各种关系，包括地理、气候和人口结构。这种形式的史学与以事件为基础的历史写作截然不同，后者重视的是短期的不同事件。

作为一个主权民族国家，新加坡的历史相对短浅。这种对长时段历史书写的渴望，体现了它对更久远过去的不懈探索。对长时段叙事的追求或许也可以解释，新加坡为何在21世纪初，单方面地寻求与20世纪初的中国革命民族主义建立有形联系，以此彰显它在这方面所做的贡献。

晚晴园—孙中山南洋纪念馆就是体现这种努力的一个实例。这栋位于马里士他路附近的老别墅，在新加坡史学上占据着一个非比寻常的位置。晚晴园展示了新加坡华人社会的现代化过程，而1911年辛亥革命的精神和价值观是其源头活水。

从1900年至1911年，孙中山曾以晚晴园作为他发展革命事业的东南亚临时基地。他到新加坡时，也住在那里。1994年以前，新加坡政府并未在宪报上将晚晴园列为国家古迹。

不过，在时任内阁资政的李光耀于2001年11月的孙中山诞辰暨辛亥革命90周年纪念活动上，为晚晴园主持开幕典礼后，孙中山和辛亥革命显然已成

为新加坡独立故事的一部分。新加坡的民族主义被认为是受到辛亥革命的启发。

在这个历史叙事中，当时居住在新加坡的华人塑造并促成了海外华人和新加坡人的民族主义。1912年，孙中山在就任中华民国临时大总统时，称华侨为“革命之母”，赞扬他们为推翻中国君主制度所做的贡献。

2000年，时任劳工部长的杨荣文指出：“辛亥革命对新加坡的反殖民运动和后来的独立运动起了促进作用……孙中山先生所激发的中华民族主义，为新加坡的民族主义运动提供了强大的动力。晚晴园见证了我们的先辈为这场重要革命所做的历史贡献，他们不仅付出金钱，也付出了鲜血和生命。”

杨荣文在2001年补充说：“新加坡人在1911年的辛亥革命扮演了重要的角色。这场革命不仅是政治上的革命，也是文化上的革命。它改变了全世界华人的自我认知。”

在过去的几年里，出现了一种重构的新加坡史。这种历史叙事以近期的考古证据为基础，证实14世纪的新加坡曾短暂存在过一个繁荣的港口，而其盛衰兴废尽在百年之间。

长时段历史观力求强调，新加坡作为大英帝国一部分的变化的记载，与莱佛士到来前，被湮没了500年的沉寂岁月，共同构成了新加坡700年的历史图景。

从新加坡在1819年前后的历史对比中，可以得出一个深刻的教训，那就是港口城市的兴衰。新加坡（作为淡马锡）也确实经历了盛衰浮沉。

现实是，在人类历史的进程中，如果没有腹地的优势和反应迅速的良好治理，港口城市的命运就会变得盛衰无常。

威尼斯共和国就是一个经常被引用的例子。威尼斯是意大利最早从事国际贸易的城市之一。它在1300年成为一个海洋帝国，并从15世纪初开始成为一个领土帝国。威尼斯的地理位置及其人民的创业精神，造就了它的成功。基本上具包容性，并赢得人民广泛支持的威尼斯政府制度，也发挥了重要作用。

存在了1000年左右的威尼斯共和国在大部分时间里，不仅是欧洲最成功的国家之一；在拿破仑于1797年征服威尼斯之前，它也是自由和独立的。

简而言之，威尼斯共和国之所以衰落，是因为

它在面对技术进步造成的贸易路线改变时，没能作出相应的调整。更糟糕的是，它无法制定和执行能从根本上反映地缘政治现实的外交政策。无法灵活地应对地缘政治变化意味着，威尼斯被卷入意大利大陆的政治之中。

了解新加坡在14世纪至18世纪的衰落过程和原因，能为它提供重要的借鉴。新加坡虽拥有得天独厚的战略位置，但它得妥善地处理气候变化（可能影响贸易路线）和亚洲地缘政治所带来的问题。换句话说，成功从来都不是预先注定的。

新加坡在14世纪末的衰落意味着，它在15世纪至17世纪中叶的东南亚“商业时代”，只是一个旁观者。当时，东南亚融入了全球贸易体系，而以贸易为基础的城市则扮演着举足轻重的角色。其中之

一的马六甲就趁势而起，取代了新加坡的贸易地位。

在纪念新加坡700年历史的众多活动和节目中，有一个如同当头一棒的重要事实：在长达700年的历史中，发展为一个港口和城市的新加坡曾至少三次突然衰落。

开埠200周年纪念活动对不同的新加坡人，自有不同的意义。然而，回首一个早已逝去的时代，应该会让新加坡人想起国家在700年来所经历的兴衰。过去50年的成功惠及了新加坡人，但成功从来没有保证。像新加坡这样一个年轻的民族国家，必须从其漫长的历史中汲取正确的教训。

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The Quest for and Learning from Singapore's *Longue Durée*

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The yearlong series of events to mark the 200th anniversary of the arrival of Stamford Raffles kicked off earlier this week. Yet, the bicentennial commemoration promises to provide a convenient segue to a more distant past. This is the concerted effort to trace Singapore's history back 700 years, half a millennia before the arrival of British colonialism in 1819. At another level, what are the lessons to be learned from Singapore's fortunes over the longer course of the past 700 years?

Raffles' acquisition of Singapore from the Johor sultanate for his employer, the East India Company, was a turning point in Singapore's history. The arrival of the British marked the economic, physical, and social transformation of the island, which continues today. Until recently, the dominant narrative was that Singapore's history began in 1819.

Nation-states often seek to project their history back to a glorious past or demonstrate that they are of a longer vintage. Singapore is no different. The bicentennial commemoration highlights that Singapore is not just a socio-political and economic entity with a 53-year independent history but one that goes back 700 years.

For historians like Fernand Braudel (1902-1985), the *longue durée* (or, the long term) is the writing of history that emphasises events that occurred imperceptibly over an extended period of time. It stresses evolving relationships between people and the world, including geography, climate, and demography. This form of historiography can be contrasted with event-based history writing that stresses short-term distinct events.

This desire for the *longue durée* is a manifestation of Singapore's restless search for a longer past given her relatively youthfulness as a sovereign nation-state. The quest for the *longue durée* may explain why Singapore had in the early 2000s also unilaterally sought a tangible connection with and contribution to the Chinese revolutionary nationalism of the early 20th century.

The Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall is an example of this effort. An old villa off Balestier Road, the Memorial Hall occupies an unusual place in Singapore's historiography. The Memorial Hall showcases the modernisation of the Singaporean Chinese community as inspired by the spirit and values of the 1911 Chinese Revolution.

It is well known that between 1900 and 1911, Sun Yat Sen had used the villa as his temporary headquarters in Southeast Asia for his revolutionary cause. He also stayed there when he visited Singapore. Prior to 1994, the government had refused to gazette the villa as a national monument.

But, in November 2001, then Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew opened the Memorial Hall in conjunction with Sun's birth anniversary and the ninetieth anniversary of the Chinese revolution. Since then, Sun and the Chinese Revolution of 1911 have apparently been appropriated into Singapore's independence story. Singapore's nationalism was identified as having its inspirations from the 1911 Chinese revolution.

In this narrative, the ethnic Chinese then living in Singapore are portrayed as having shaped and contributed to the nationalism of the diasporic Chinese, and Singapore's. In his 1912 inauguration as the provisional President of the Republic of China, Sun had described the overseas Chinese as the "Mother of the Revolution", paying tribute to their contributions in the overthrow of the monarchy in China.

In 2000, then Trade and Industry Minister George Yeo noted that, "The 1911 revolution contributed to Singapore's anti-colonial movement and, later, independence.... the Chinese nationalism awakened by Dr Sun provided a lot of energy for Singapore's nationalism. The [Memorial Hall] is a testament to the historical contributions our forefathers made to that important revolution, not only with money but also with their blood and their lives".

In 2001, Yeo added that, "Singaporeans played a significant role in the Chinese Revolution of 1911 which was not only a political revolution but also a cultural revolution which changed the way Chinese all over the world saw themselves".

In the past few years, a revitalised history of Singapore has come to the fore. This narrative pivots on the recent archaeological evidence substantiating the short-lived existence of a thriving entrepôt in Singapore in the 14th century, which rose and declined abruptly all within 100 years.

The *longue durée* seeks to highlight simultaneously that the Singapore's 700-year past melds the documented change in Singapore as part of the British Empire with that of the submerged, almost silent history of the five hundred years prior to Raffles' arrival.

One poignant lesson that can be teased out from this juxtaposition of Singapore's history post-1819 and pre-1819 is that port cities wax and wane. Singapore (as Temasek) did experience the rise and decline.

The reality is that in the course of human history, without the benefit of a hinterland and good responsive governance, the fortunes of port cities have ebbed and flowed.

Venice is an oft-cited example. Venice was among the first Italian cities to engage in international commerce. A maritime empire by 1300, it also became a territorial empire from the early 1400s. Its location and the entrepreneurial verve of her people contributed to Venice's success. Its system of government--largely inclusive and won the broad support of the citizenry--also played a big part too.

For most of its thousand-year existence, Venice was not only one of the most successful European states; it was also free and independent until Napoleon conquered it in 1797.

Briefly put, Venice declined as it failed to adapt to the displacements of trade routes owing to technological advances. This was compounded by its inability to formulate and implement a foreign policy that reflected the underlying geopolitical reality. This inflexibility in responding to the geopolitical changes meant that Venice became embroiled in the politics of the Italian mainland.

Learning how and why Singapore of the 14th to 18th centuries declined bears important lessons for Singapore. Singapore is blessed with a strategic location but climate change (which may affect trade routes) and geopolitics in Asia will have to be handled adroitly. In other words, success is never pre-ordained.

Singapore's decline at the end of the 14th century meant that Singapore was but a spectator in Southeast Asia's "Age of Commerce" between the 15th and mid-17th centuries. Southeast Asia was then integrated into a global trade system, with trade-based cities playing a pivotal role. Malacca, for one, stepped up to take the place of Singapore.

Amid the many activities and events to mark Singapore's 700 years of history, there is one poignant truth that is a reality check. In its 700-year history, Singapore developed as a port and city and abruptly declined at least three times.

The bicentennial commemoration will mean different things to different Singaporeans. Yet this look back to a long-gone era should remind Singaporeans of the waxing and waning of Singapore in the passage of 700 years. The success of the past 50 years is a boon for Singaporeans but success is never guaranteed. A young nation-state, like Singapore, must learn the correct lessons of its extended past.