

SCHOLARS' CHOICE 2025

# Making sense of regional power dynamics

This rising ISEAS academic contributes to South-east Asia's future through analysis that drives policies affecting daily life

For his job, Eugene Tan pitches story ideas, pens articles and takes on his editor's questions to sharpen his narrative. Lest one mistakes the 29-year-old for a journalist, he is a research officer at ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute (ISEAS).

Eugene crafts analyses for policymakers, diplomatic and business communities, as well as think tanks from around the region.

From concise 800-word commentaries to detailed 5,000-word articles, his pieces appear on Fulcrum, the institute's publicly accessible blog. His work helps to shape discussions about the region's past, present and future.

"When I began receiving requests to speak about the topics covered in these pieces, I realised how much weight my words carried," he says.

library, home to valuable South-east Asian archives, some preserved in an 18 deg C repository. He remains informed through The Straits Times and The Economist, tuning in to podcasts and perusing new books in line with his interests.

This appetite for knowledge sparks dynamic intellectual exchanges with his colleagues, many of whom are also in their 20s. Together with them, Eugene debunks the misconception that academics are elderly, bookish or stuffy. The Arsenal fan follows football, sings karaoke and plays video games. He also runs and goes indoor skydiving with his wife.

But his job and passion are always on his mind. He admits sheepishly: "I relax by reading a book on China to destress from my work on China."

As a young scholar, it is both daunting and rewarding to know **your analysis shapes how people understand the region.**

**Eugene Tan**  
Recipient of the Tun Dato Sir Cheng-Lock Tan MA Scholarship

"Someone high up is taking note of what you are saying and thinking that you are saying something important."

"As a young scholar, it is both daunting and rewarding to know your analysis shapes how people understand the region."

Working with over 28 researchers at the institute – from research associates to senior fellows – Eugene studies and provides insights on socio-political, security and economic trends, and developments in the region.

Beyond briefing diplomats and regional leaders, he coordinates research projects and helps organise events that bring delegates together. He also lends a hand in producing the institute's podcast, Dialogues at Fulcrum.

**A young academic's life**

Eugene's journey into academia began at River Valley (RV) High School when he role-played as a country delegate and director of the Security Council in RV Model United Nations (RVMUN) through his co-curricular activity, the Humanities and Current Affairs Society.

That early taste of international relations led him to study political science and sociology at Singapore Management University.

He later earned a master's in international relations at the London School of Economics and Political Science on the Tun Dato Sir Cheng-Lock Tan MA Scholarship. It was offered by ISEAS, one of a few organisations in Singapore that provides scholarships to aspiring academics.

Today, Eugene is no longer playing pretend like in secondary school. Within a year of joining ISEAS, he has presented his research to diplomats and policy experts at overseas conferences, often facing rooms filled with holders of research doctorates who are decades his senior.

To stay on top of his field, Eugene spends hours reading in the institute's five-storey



To stay on top of his field, ISEAS research officer Eugene Tan devotes hours to reading in the institute's library. PHOTO: SPH MEDIA

Scan for more on the Tun Dato Sir Cheng-Lock Tan MA Scholarship.