



Special Seminar

The Illusion of Choice


Understanding Singapore's 2025 General Elections

2025. June. 9 Mon 14:30-16:00

Format Hybrid

Tonantei (Room 201)

2nd Floor, Inamori Center, Kyoto University

 *For Zoom participants, please join from the following link (no registration required):
Zoom <https://kyoto-u-edu.zoom.us/j/91896051132?pwd=NkUiVqYc5PVE6rPnCB8CfBLOqLvHZd.1>



Access / Zoom Link

Abstract

Singapore's general elections are often read as expressions of the electorate's will—"the people have spoken." This talk argues that the elections are designed to do the opposite – they obfuscate that will, preserving PAP dominance through mechanisms such as First-Past-The-Post, compulsory voting, gerrymandering, fear, media control, and institutional asymmetry. Voter behaviour, shaped by fear and political illiteracy, cannot be interpreted as genuine choice. With limited data on voter intentions, what do Singapore's elections really reveal? This talk reframes the elections as constrained referendums on the PAP. Within this context, it analyses the 2025 General Elections, arguing that (a) global political shifts shaped local sentiment; (b) the PAP executed a strategically strong campaign; and (c) the Workers' Party has consolidated its role within the system, benefitting from incumbency. The talk concludes by outlining strategic recommendations for other opposition parties, emphasising the importance of grassroots organising and sustained political education to challenge entrenched authoritarian dominance.

Bio

Thum Ping Tjin

Thum Ping Tjin ("PJ") is Founder of New Naratif, a movement to democratise democracy in Southeast Asia. He is an award-winning and best-selling writer, Rhodes Scholar, Commonwealth Scholar, Olympic athlete, and the first Singaporean to swim the English Channel. His work is on Malayan nationalism and decolonisation and, more broadly, Southeast Asian governance and politics. He has a doctorate in history from Oxford, where he was also a fellow between 2014 and 2022. His most recent work is "Nationalism and Decolonisation in Singapore: The Malayan Generation, 1953-63" (Routledge, 2024). He is currently a research affiliate at Kyoto University's Center for Southeast Asian Studies.

