

# Living Legacy:

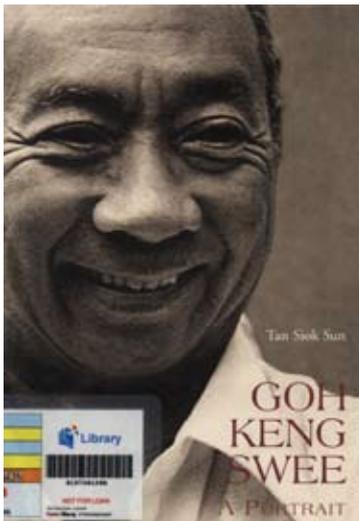
A Brief Survey of Literature on Dr Goh Keng Swee



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*“Anybody who wants to prosper in this world must have an ambition.... Our ambition must be to make ourselves useful to our country, our people and ourselves.”*

(Goh Keng Swee, *My ambitions*, 1931)



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him, *Goh Keng Swee: A Portrait*, back in 2007. Tan's work is a sprinkling of personal vignettes blended into a narrative tracking Goh's career as drawn largely from published sources. This is in contrast with the more journalistic style employed by Asad-ul Iqbal Latif in his 2009 biography of Lim Kim San and, on the other end of the spectrum, Joan Hon's intensely personal 1984 account of her father, Hon Sui Sen.

Another source would be the memoirs or biographies of colleagues and subordinates that mention their relationship with Dr Goh. For instance, Lee Kuan Yew's *The Singapore Story*, Ngiam's *A Mandarin and the Making of Public Policy*, Silcock's *A History of Economics Teaching & Graduates* or the recorded memories of opponents like his friend Eu Chooi Yip: *浪尖逐梦: 余柱业口述历史档案* (2006).

Virtually all histories of post-war Singapore would mention Dr Goh's role in the development of Singapore's economy

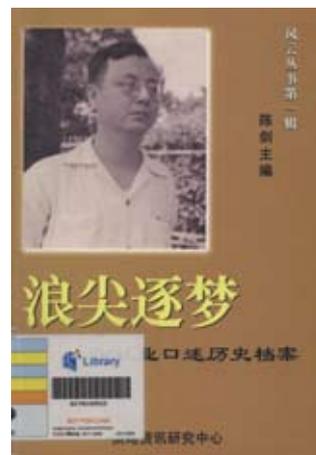
The passing of Dr Goh Keng Swee has sparked renewed interest in the wealth of literature on this renaissance man.

## LIFE AND TIMES

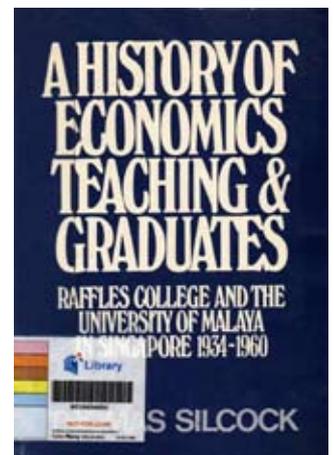
To begin with, a person's autobiography would be the obvious place to look for information about a person, or failing that, a biography. In Dr Goh Keng Swee's case, although he declined to write his memoirs, his daughter-in-law, Tan Siok Sun, published a biography of

and many would also cover his development of the Singapore Armed Forces. For instance, Edwin Lee's *Singapore: The Unexpected Nation* (2008) or Turnbull's *A History of Modern Singapore, 1819–2005* (3rd ed., 2009). Many works about post-war Singapore, especially those dealing with Singapore's economic development, mention Dr Goh's role as economic architect. Interestingly enough, one of the compilations about Singapore's leaders made history in its own right: Melanie Chew's *Leaders of Singapore* (1996), which contains the account of her interview with Dr Goh. In this significant account, Dr Goh revealed to her that the separation from the Federation of Malaysia was not initiated by Malaysia as was conventionally believed at the time (p. 147).

For those interested in vignettes of Dr Goh, a good place to look happens to be the various commemorative volumes published by the different organisations Dr Goh touched. A good example of this would be the civil service's commemorative volume, *Pioneers Once More* in which Philip Yeo mentions that Dr Goh, his superior, actually drafted a policy memo for



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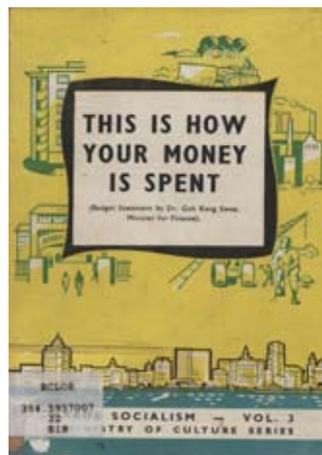
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him! (Chua, 2010). ST Engineering's *UnChartered Territory* includes a section by Lai Chun Loong (Kuah, pp. 53–59), better known as the junior engineer who was summoned by Dr Goh to strip down a M16 rifle and separate locally manufactured from imported parts. On a different note, the recently published book on the PAP, *Men in White*, gives a dramatisation of the founding of the Malayan Forum.

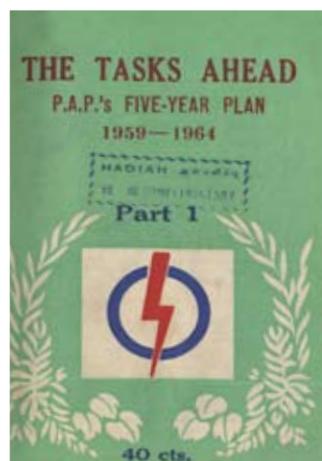
The study of Dr Goh's ideas is just begun. One book-length work specifically on Dr Goh's ideas is Austin's *Goh Keng Swee and Southeast Asian Governance*. More comprehensive is the recent book by Dr Ooi Kee Beng, commissioned by the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, *In Lieu of Ideology* (Ooi, 2010). An early work examining Dr Goh's policies was published in 1964, regarding the development of Jurong Industrial Estate: *Go-ahead at Goh's Folly: Singapore's Gamble with Industrial Expansion*.

### SPEECHES AND PAPERS

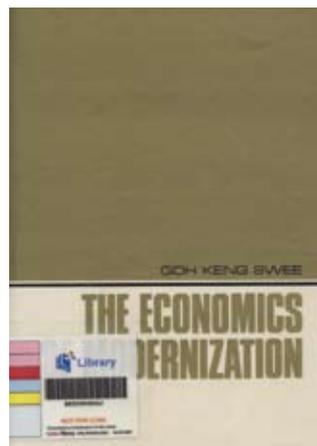
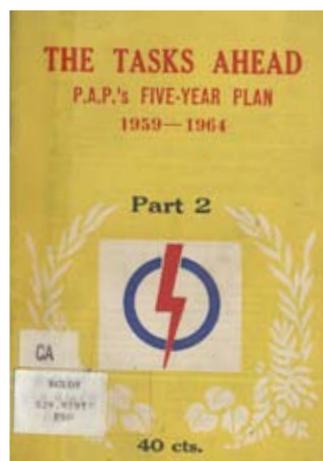
Turning to Dr Goh's personal philosophy and thoughts, we can leaf through the various speeches and papers he presented over the decades. Of obvious importance would be the three published compilations, two compiled by him (*The Economics of Modernization* published in 1972 and *The Practice of Economic Growth* published in 1977), and one



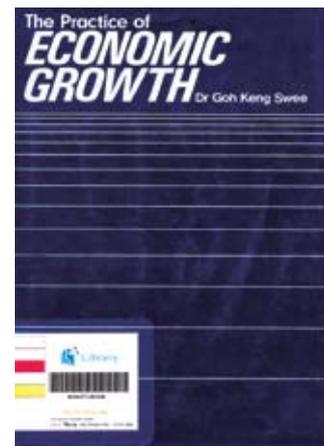
Budget statement presented by Dr Goh as Minister for Finance in 1960. All rights reserved, Ministry of Finance, 1960.



All rights reserved, Petir, 1959.



All rights reserved, Asia Pacific Press, 1972.



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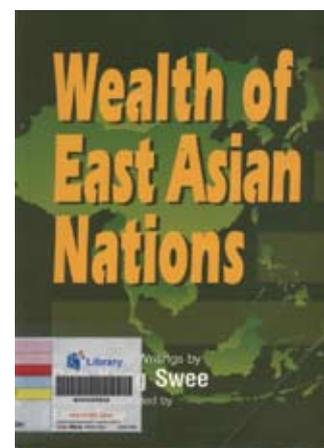
explain the core philosophy of Temasek Holdings to an American Congressional Committee:

“One of the tragic illusions that many countries of the Third World entertain is the notion that politicians and civil servants can successfully perform entrepreneurial functions. It is curious that, in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary, the belief persists.” (p. ix–x)

The writing style of *The Economics of Modernization* also happens to be the most personable of the three works, perhaps because it is largely from the 1960s, when he was still largely addressing lay audiences. The second volume, *The Practice of Economic Growth*, is from the mid-70s when he was Minister of Defence while the last volume covers the late 70s to the early 90s.

Dr Goh's first official report, *Urban Incomes & Housing* (1956), was completed while he was working in the Social Welfare Department. His next was a People's Action Party policy document: *The Tasks Ahead: P.A.P.'s Five-year Plan, 1959-1964* (1959). Another significant report written by him is the *Report on the Ministry of Education 1978*. There are many more reports Dr Goh commissioned, such as the *Report on Moral Education 1979* whose committee was headed by Ong Teng Cheong; or the 1947 *A Social Survey of Singapore* on which he was a committee member.

Those interested in tracing the early developments in Dr Goh's life can look to *The Economic Front*, published in 1940 just before the Japanese invasion of Malaya. This was his first academic paper (Silcock, p. 39). Another notable piece is his 1956 London School of Economics PhD thesis, *Techniques of National Income Estimation in Underdeveloped Territories, with Special Reference to Asia and Africa*. Though the original is owned by the London School



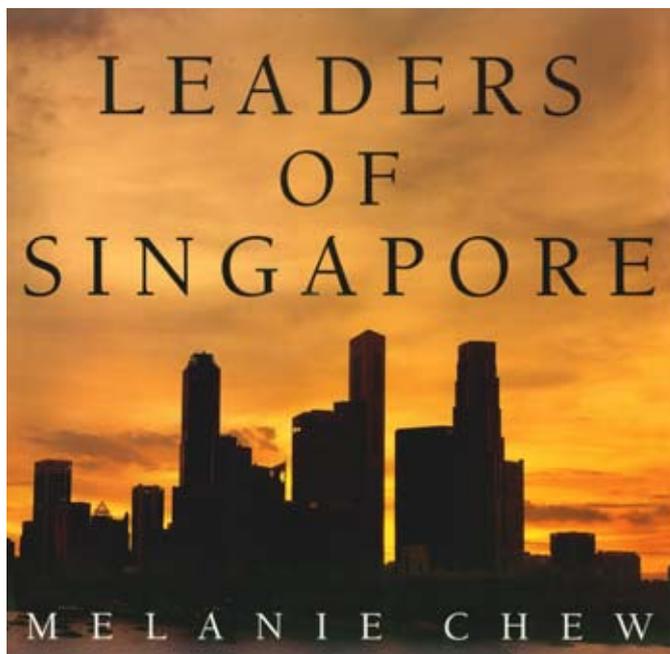
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of Economics, a microfilm copy resides with the National University of Singapore Library.

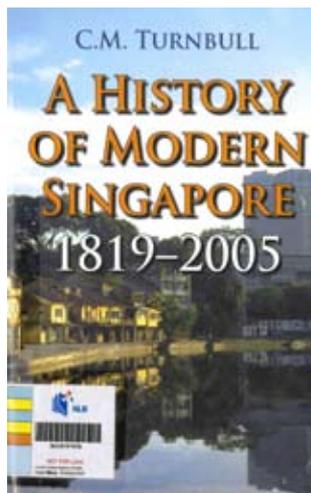
However, the earliest known published work by Dr Goh comes from an earlier time: a simple essay written when he was a Standard Five Anglo-Chinese School student who wanted nothing more than “to become an engineer” because “China needs engineers, scientists, inventors and sailors badly ... to help her become one of the best nations in the world.” (Goh, *My ambitions*, 1931).

Many of Dr Goh’s other speeches and papers can be found on the National Archives’ a2o website. Significant speeches have been published separately as is the case with many budget speeches such as his 1960 speech, descriptively titled *This is How Your Money is Spent*; or in the government publication *Speeches: A Monthly Collection of Ministerial Speeches*. His speeches in Parliament can be found within the voluminous official Parliamentary record: *Parliamentary Debates Singapore: Official Record*. One of his most interesting speeches in the *Debates* was made on 13 March 1967 during the second reading of the 1967 Bill making National Service compulsory. Unfortunately, a search of these sources has not yet uncovered the paper *Noah’s Ark Progresses Through the SAF*, referred to by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong in his eulogy at Dr Goh’s state Funeral on 23 May 2010 (Lee, 2010).

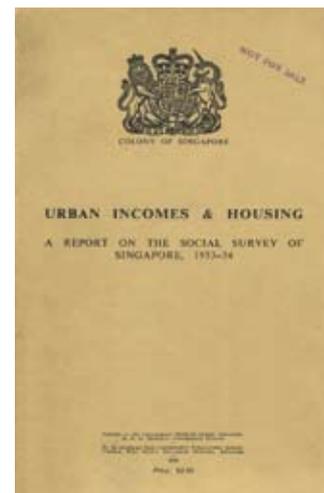
In addition, the a2o website holds an extensive collection of photographs and archived material shot over the decades by State and Singapore Press Holdings photographers. These photographs show Dr Goh and his colleagues at various official and community functions over the years and are well worth perusing. In five years time, a2o will also give public access to the oral history interviews with Dr Goh. These interviews were conducted with the agreement that they would only be released five years after his passing. In the meantime, researchers will have to be content with the many oral history interviews that mention Dr Goh.



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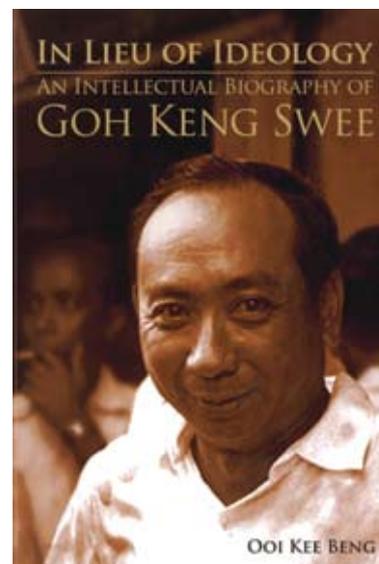


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All rights reserved, Department of Social Welfare, Singapore, 1956.

Finally, yet another significant source of information is the newspapers. The most convenient and accessible source of these happens to be The Straits Times as it has been digitised and put online by the National Library at the NewspaperSG (newspapers.nl.sg) website. However, NewspaperSG coverage ends in 2006, and the two-week-outpouring of news articles in The Straits Times starting with Dr Goh’s passing on 14 May 2010 is not yet available. For that, one can either use the National Library’s microfilm record of the newspapers or depend on the Factiva news database. Factiva is also useful for locating articles published in the foreign press over the past two to three decades.



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It is hoped that this brief survey of published material on Dr Goh will prove a useful starting point for researchers seeking to comprehend the legacy left by Dr Goh.

For further information or assistance, please contact the National Library’s enquiry service, Reference Point (ref@nlb.gov.sg) or visit us in person at the National Library Building on Victoria Street (11<sup>th</sup> floor, 10 am to 9 pm daily).

The author wishes to acknowledge the contributions of Azizah Sidek, Principal Librarian, National Library, in reviewing this article. ■

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### Errata

We apologise for the following errors in BiblioAsia, Vol 6, Issue 2, July 2010.

- 1) p. 13, title: Title revised to "Physical Education and Sports in Singapore Schools (Part I) — Establishing a Strong Foundation"
- 2) p. 21, 2nd last para, p. 23, fn. 10 & p. 23, reference 22: The name "Winstead" should be spelt as "Winstedt".
- 3) p. 33, para 1, line 2 should be: "These globe-trotters ... travelling as far up as Johore's plantations before proceeding to the more exotic Far East."
- 4) p. 34, para 3, line 1 should be: "When on 1 July 1896, the Federated Malay States was inaugurated with Pahang, Perak, Selangor and Negri Sembilan under British advisors, ...."
- 5) p. 44, para 2: "ship-chandling was incorrectly reflected as "ship-handling."
- 6) p. 44, 2nd last para and last line: The publication date of Song Ong Siang's book should be 1923, instead of 1902.