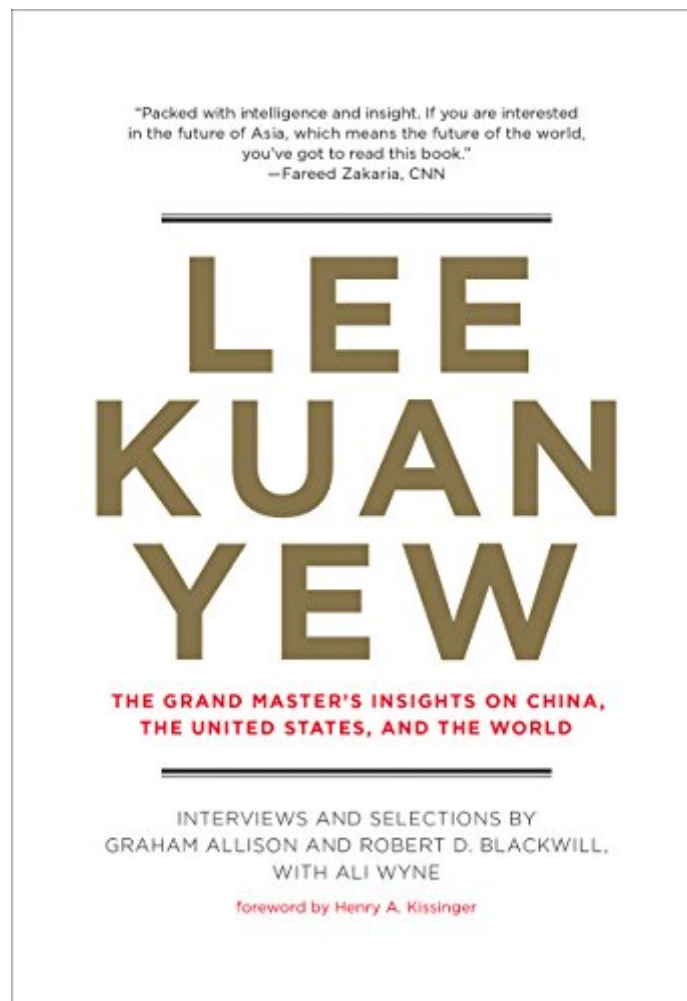


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Lee Kuan Yew: The Grand Master's Insights On China, The United States, And The World (Belfer Center Studies In International Security)



Synopsis

When Lee Kuan Yew speaks, presidents, prime ministers, diplomats, and CEOs listen. Lee, the founding father of modern Singapore and its prime minister from 1959 to 1990, has honed his wisdom during more than fifty years on the world stage. Almost single-handedly responsible for transforming Singapore into a Western-style economic success, he offers a unique perspective on the geopolitics of East and West. American presidents from Richard Nixon to Barack Obama have welcomed him to the White House; British prime ministers from Margaret Thatcher to Tony Blair have recognized his wisdom; and business leaders from Rupert Murdoch to Rex Tillerson, CEO of Exxon Mobil, have praised his accomplishments. This book gathers key insights from interviews, speeches, and Lee's voluminous published writings and presents them in an engaging question and answer format. Lee offers his assessment of China's future, asserting, among other things, that "China will want to share this century as co-equals with the U.S." He affirms the United States' position as the world's sole superpower but expresses dismay at the vagaries of its political system. He offers strategic advice for dealing with China and goes on to discuss India's future, Islamic terrorism, economic growth, geopolitics and globalization, and democracy. Lee does not pull his punches, offering his unvarnished opinions on multiculturalism, the welfare state, education, and the free market. This little book belongs on the reading list of every world leader -- including the one who takes the oath of office on January 20, 2013.

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Customer Reviews

Singapore has an airport like a movie set and home ownership for 95% of citizens, science and math scores higher than Japan's. Singapore's per capita GNP is now higher than that of its colonizer, Great Britain. It has the world's busiest port, is the third-largest oil refiner, the lowest cost of health care of any developed nation, and has become a major center of global manufacturing and service. In 1965 it ranked economically with Chile, Argentina and Mexico, now its per capita GNP is 4- 5X theirs, exceeding that in America. Lee was prime minister from independence in 1959 until 1990, when he allowed his hand-picked successor and now his eldest son to succeed; he's still 'Senior Minister' with enormous influence. Nixon speculated that, had Lee lived in another time and another place, he might have 'attained the world stature of a Churchill, a Disraeli, or a Gladstone.' On America, Lee likes the free and open argument about what is good or bad for society, and none of the secrecy and terror that's part of communist government. He also sees the focus on individual freedom as creating its leadership in innovation. Other parts are totally unacceptable - guns, drugs, violent crime, vagrancy, unbecoming behavior in public, symptoms of the breakdown of civil society. Freedom to have maximum enjoyment of one's freedoms can only exist in an ordered state - not contention and anarchy. America has a vicious drug problem. To solve it, it goes around the world helping other anti-narcotic agencies try and stop the suppliers. And when provoked, it captures the president of Panama and puts him on trial. In Singapore, any policeman who sees someone behaving suspiciously leading him to suspect the person is under the influence of drugs can require that person to have his urine tested.

I am a student with a casual interest in emerging international markets such as those of China, India and Singapore. I purchased this book hoping to learn something useful pertaining to that area. This book is a compilation of Lee Kuan Yew's (henceforth LKY) thoughts pertaining to 9 topics: the future of China, the United States, US-China relations, India, Islamic Extremism, National Economic Growth, Geopolitics and Globalization, and Democracy. The final topic is "How Lee Kuan Yew Thinks." This book's strengths are numerous. LKY is a personally interesting man with a lot of valuable experience leading Singapore. He has an unusual perspective, as Singapore's Prime Minister for 31 years. The topics chosen are generally of broad interest, such as the future of India,

China, the US, etc. He also has a different perspective on the usefulness of democracy, which as an American reader I found interesting. That being said, when this book misses, it really misses. For example, take this statement about the future of the US: "Multiculturalism will destroy America. There is a danger that large numbers of Mexicans and others from South and Central America will continue to come to the U.S. and spread their culture across the whole of the country. If they breed faster than the WASPs [white Anglo-Saxon Protestants] and are living with them, whose culture will prevail?" This view, that large numbers of lazy immigrants are going to change American culture to one of dependency, is one that LKY returns to several times, and I do not find it to be credible. However, because this book is just a compilation of quotes, it is of course impossible for him to defend his assertions. There is nothing for the reader to do except keep going.

Years ago, after making some money, I thought, Why am I living in a cesspool like Detroit? Coincidentally, I began reading a long article about Singapore, which seemed like the antithesis of Detroit, so I subsequently vacationed there for two weeks with the intent of eventually emigrating, because Singapore seemed like paradise to me. Everything was clean (not one fly or mosquito), modern and pleasant, but it was nothing like the police state the American press had led me to expect. Good beer was sold outdoors on every street corner, and on the weekend there was dancing in the streets downtown. I felt safe at all times and in every neighborhood, and I observed the police in easy conversation with residents of the neighborhood they served. Most American periodicals were available at the Singapore newsstands. One of my conceits is that I know some history, but I can think of no precedent of a national transformation like that of Singapore. Within one generation, per capita income there rose from \$400 a year to \$50,000. Credit for this utopia must go to the late Lee Kuan Yew, so he is certainly someone worth listening to. Unfortunately, this is not the book of Lee's wisdom that it is touted to be. Most of the quotations from Lee are from speeches he made or recorded interviews, while very few are from Lee's writing, and imagine how wise the smartest person you know might sound if his or her ordinary conversation were recorded and transcribed. Addressing a general audience requires basic ideas drawn in broad strokes, so in the pages of this book Lee, at times, seems to dispense wisdom on a level with that of Polonius: "Technology and innovation have become more important factors for economic success."

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