

# **Spaces of Autonomy, Spaces of Hope: the place of the university in postcolonial Singapore**

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This article explores the background to and consequences of the resignation of B.R. Sreenivasan as the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Singapore in October 1963, after a public clash with the People's Action Party State government, led by Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew. Sreenivasan's resignation has been the subject of radically different historical interpretations. It has been celebrated by some nationalist historians as part of a process of cultural decolonization, but criticized by others as precipitating a two-decade long erosion academic freedom in Singapore. Careful attention to the event and its context, however, offers a powerful heuristic concerning the place of higher education in the process of decolonization, and the manner in which colonial universities came to be symbolic repositories of nationalism with some degree of autonomy from the state. Debates on the role of the university that arose in Singapore after the resignation were plural, and diverse, and have much to teach us not only of the past, but also a future in which international research universities such as the National University of Singapore embrace contradictory roles, and yet still strive for new forms of academic autonomy..

**Philip Holden** is Professor of English at the National University of Singapore. He has studied and taught in the United Kingdom, the United States, and Canada, but has spent most of his adult life in Singapore, where he researches two major areas of literary studies. His work in auto/biography studies includes the book *Autobiography and Decolonization: Modernity, Masculinity and the Nation-State*, and a number of scholarly articles in major scholarly journals such as *biography*, *Life Writing*, *a/b: Auto/biography Studies*, and *Postcolonial Studies*. He has also published widely on Singapore and Southeast Asian literatures, is the co-author of *The Routledge Concise History of Southeast Asian Writing in English*, and one of the editors of *Writing Singapore*, the most comprehensive historical anthology of Singapore literature in English. His short story collection *Heaven Has Eyes* was recently published by Epigram Books, and he has developing research interests in short fiction and critical university studies.

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**12:00 Noon**

**Room 203, Luce Hall, 34 Hillhouse Avenue**