

East Asian Institute gets new leadership

Dutch national becomes NUS institute's fourth director after stint with World Bank

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The East Asian Institute (EAI) at the National University of Singapore (NUS) has new leadership after both stalwart chairman Wang Gungwu and director Zheng Yongnian stepped down recently.

Dutch national Bert Hofman has taken over from Professor Zheng since last week after being the World Bank's country director for China, Mongolia and Korea based in Beijing. He was previously chief economist for the World Bank and director of its Singapore office between 2011 and 2014.

He is EAI's fourth director after Prof Zheng, Professor Yang Dali and Professor Wang, who headed the centre from 1997 to 2006 before he became chairman.

When contacted, Mr Hofman said he was excited to join the institute, which has a strong reputation for studying China and North-east Asia.

"This is a particularly good time to join the institute as China's arrival as a key player on the international stage requires fresh thinking on issues ranging from China's own policies, its relationships with its trading partners, to the shape of the international order," he said.

He cited the current trade dispute between the United States and China as an issue which requires "more than ever fact-based analysis of the causes and nature of the tensions, its possible impact on the region, and development of options for possible solutions".

"I hope that EAI can continue to contribute knowledge and analysis to these and other important issues for the East Asia region," he said.

Mr Hofman, who has an economics degree from Erasmus University Rotterdam and a master's in economics from the University of Kiel in Germany, is no stranger to the region, having also worked as country director for the Philippines for the World Bank before his first posting in Singapore.

Prof Zheng told *The Straits Times* that after 11 years of running the institute, he wanted to shift his focus to research, having amassed a number of large research projects.

"I hope that by relinquishing the directorship, I will be able to write up these projects in this new period of my career. I feel that EAI could do more to serve Singapore, and I do believe that the new director will lead the institute to a new stage," said Prof Zheng, who remains at the institute as research professor.



Mr Bert Hofman has taken over from Professor Zheng Yongnian as director of the East Asian Institute.

Prof Wang recently also handed over the institute's chairmanship to Dr Teh Kok Peng, another former World Bank executive.

Dr Teh started his career at the World Bank and, before his retirement in 2011, was president of special investments at the Singapore Government's private equity arm GIC. He is a senior adviser of Hong Kong-listed investment bank China International Capital Corporation.

Dr Teh earned his PhD in economics at Oxford University.

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