The *idea* of Singapore

Commentary:
Volume 22, 2013
The Idea of Singapore

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Mission Statement

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Singapore: National *ideas* and City-state Branding

*By **Victor R Savage***

Singapore: National Ideas and City-state Branding

Introduction: The Little Red Dot

Singapore, our home and city-state, has over the last three decades become a place synonymous with many different global benchmarks, international awards, urban ideas as well as negative perceptions. This issue has encased these various views of the City-state under the theme of the 'idea' of Singapore which is meant broadly to encompass impressions, opinions, thoughts, beliefs, vague notions, branding or even strange views. I will also include the noted urban planner Kevin Lynch's idea of 'image' and 'imageability' or what makes the City-state memorable, vivid, apparent, distinct and remarkable. Yet the concern here is not the outsiders' but rather the insiders' views of the City-state. To capture this evolving global perception and impression, this issue has tapped on important Singaporean voices across a spectrum of fields, government officials, private sector, Non-governmental Organisation (NGO) activists and academics to pen their critical views on areas that have made Singapore different, distinct and important in the regional and global arena.

Singapore's global and regional image is mixed with rather extreme positive and negative perceptions - the City-state has witnessed its share of poor publicity and criticisms. In fact, bad publicity in the press has not helped over the years. It has been called a 'city of a million dustbins' when its clean and green campaign was in full swing; a 'fine' city because of its multiple fines for misdemeanors; a 'nanny state' for the top-down government controls on its citizens and an authoritarian political system. The former Indonesian President BJ (Bacharuddin Jusuf) Habibie referred to the City-state as the 'Little Red Dot' which Singapore's power elites used as a badge of honour. For Southeast Asians, colour symbolisms matter. What did President Habibie have in mind when he saw Indonesia coloured as Green (the colour of Islam) and in its midst this Red Dot? At face value, a 'red dot' might seem like a reference to Singapore's small location on a world map. However, unlike the Chinese, many Indonesians would not equate 'red' as an auspicious colour or to good luck. In *wayang kulit*, black, white and yellow are better symbolic *halus* (good, beautiful) colours and red is sometimes associated with things *kasar* (crude) and *jelek* (bad or evil).

In the Javanese five-fold classification system, red, the colour of the south, refers to the profession of a 'trader' and is characterised by 'avariciousness' and associated with 'money'. Hence 'red' for the Javanese-Balinese is an apt symbolic colour for Singapore, a city of shopkeepers, money lenders and traders. Within the cultural and civilisation context of the Southeast Asian region, the reference to a city of traders is derogatory. Clifford Geertz noted the Javanese word for trader, *wong dagang*

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also means foreigner, alien and wanderer and thus not culturally accepted in society. Within the context of Hindu-Javanese civilisation, traders were looked upon as marginal people of low valuation in society. Obviously, civilisation in the *Alam Melayu* (Malay World) saw cultured people in a different light – it was not just about material or economic wealth but also one's perfection and talents as an artistic, spiritual and creative expression.

Singapore's Global Attraction: The First World Story

The Singapore story is best told in a couple of recent books[1] by its modern founder and former Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew. His story has elicited worldwide interest especially from leaders and peoples in the developing world. What makes the Singapore story so attractive? One might ascribe four reasons for this interest in Singapore.

First, the world is a jigsaw of states, be it nation-states, city-states and mere multi-cultural states, or what Benedict Anderson calls 'imagined communities'. In the last 60 years (1950–2010), the global population has almost tripled from 2.6 billion to 7 billion while states have more than doubled from 80 to 193. While we might live in a 'global village' through instantaneous media, 24/7 communication links and Information Technology (IT) networks, states still remain the benchmark of global cooperation and disagreements, and 'clash and dialogue' scenarios. Despite globalisation and all its pronouncements of the death of distance, a borderless world and the end of geography, the world is still hostage to states and national governments. While companies are said to becoming like new countries, states and cities are also behaving like surrogate companies. In a world of competing countries, states are the equivalent of commodity brand names – every state wants to project its best face internationally to garner investments, industrial plants, financial loans, Foreign Direct Investments (FDI), skilled labour and secure trading relationships. Singapore is certainly a well-respected brand name in the global exchange of competing states.

The state has become the international benchmark for international comparisons, global standards as well as tracking national development improvements. Singapore has garnered attention not by default but by conscious and systematic government policies to put the tiny City-state on global radar screens. The Singapore government has worked incessantly to ensure that Singapore's development trajectory is not left to chance and hence

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[1] Lee Kuan Yew (2000), *From Third World to First: The Singapore Story: 1965-2000*, Singapore: Singapore Press Holdings and Times Edition; and Lee Kuan Yew (2011), *Hard Truths to Keep Singapore Going*, Singapore: The Straits Times Press.

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underpinned by its *kiasu* (afraid to lose) policies and leadership concerns. The government's use of a combination of environmental 'deterministic' (small size, no natural resources and vulnerable geography) and 'possibilist' (relying on science, technology, investment in education and pragmatic governance) ideological indoctrinations has conditioned Singaporeans to believe that they have little options to play with and to 'stick with the devil you know than one you do not know' in the elections.

However, the tide is changing as younger Singaporeans want their voices heard. The moot question is whether Singapore can still maintain its economic buoyancy, creativity and global advantage as the City-state rises up global rankings with more intense competition. Singapore's model of success is thus the icon and envy of many developing countries, yet, how it deals with liberalisation and democratisation is also being closely watched. The historical inertia of Singapore's well-known strict, stern political system is difficult to change and is best demonstrated in heated debates on the Yale-NUS College (opening in August 2013). For Singaporeans, the Yale-NUS College will be the academic yeast in signalling more liberalisation; for Yale academics, the College is an affront and betrayal of the School's legendary and august tradition as a pivot of open debate, student protest and liberal values.

Secondly, the City-state has clearly made its mark internationally in many different sectors. It has gained reputable global attention for Changi Airport and the renowned Singapore Airlines, winner of the Best Airline Award for many years. It remains internationally ranked in size and capacity as an oil refining centre (second in the world), a container port (second in the world), foreign exchange centre (fourth in the world) and enjoys one of the top 10 national per capita incomes worldwide. It also has the distinction of having the highest-paid government leaders globally. Singapore has also gained a positive international reputation as a clean and green city, a relatively corrupt-free working environment, a good public housing system meeting 82 percent of citizen housing requirements, an enviable public health system and a well-developed educational system. Singapore is also known increasingly for its soft culture. It is well known for its fusion foods (chilly crabs, rojak, mee pok , laksa, chicken rice) and film credits and awards at the Cannes and Asian film festivals. More recently its F1 night race has become the 'jewel' in the global motor sporting circuit. The combination of achievements in so many different sectors has made Singapore a country other societies, corporations, NGOs and states look to as possible options and alternative methods for improving their own economic competitiveness.

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Thirdly, Singapore has been a model city and state for the developing world. Its economic achievements since independence in 1965 are nothing short of remarkable and almost a miracle. Singapore, along with South Korea, Hong Kong and Taiwan were often touted as the miracle Asian dragon economies because of the sustained spectacular economic growth and development achievements. In a world where states are falling by the wayside due to inept governments, rampant corruption and weak political vision, the Singapore economic success story is a lesson other developing countries want to emulate in three ways.

i) As a developing country in the tropical world, its steady growth and development has banished the long-held western view since Classical times of environmentalism – the idea that the tropics could not spur civilisation and progress and societies are doomed to remain undeveloped. In Southeast Asia, the sustained colonial perception of the native population was one of indolence and laziness because the tropical climate evidently made people listless and tired. Singapore's success as a city-state in the tropical world has inspired other lesser-developed tropical countries. Singapore is an antidote to Jeffrey Sachs' environmental deterministic credo for African countries as adumbrated in

his book, *The End of Poverty*. Singapore's ability to shed off the tropical handicaps for development is clearly a plus point even though air conditioning is used widely to circumvent the tropical climate at the workplace.

ii) Singapore is one of the small countries in the United Nations (UN) in a sea of giant and large countries. Small countries once again are seen as being disadvantaged politically, economically and strategically. Yet, Singapore spearheaded the informal Forum of Small States (FOSS) at the UN to ensure small states are not forgotten and marginalised. As UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon noted in October 2012 at the FOSS 20th anniversary meeting, "Being small does not mean an absence of big ideas." The current 105 members of FOSS (all with populations below 10 million) certainly carry political huff at the UN and can help to ensure a ruled-based international system that at least listens and considers vulnerable small states in deliberations.

iii) The rapid rate at which Singapore moved up the developmental ladder from Third to First World status within 40 years in a period of rapid economic change and competition, in a multi-polar world

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and with globalising forces, gives hope to other developing countries that development is not a pipe dream. Nothing is more valid for developing countries than a vivid example that change is possible with the right menu of good governance, percipient leadership, controlled corruption, disciplined labour and investments in education, infrastructure and quality of living.

Fourthly, Singapore is unique as a city-state and hence international comparisons of Singapore are not only made at state level but also at the urban-city levels. With increasing globalisation, it would seem that the fountainhead of creativity, dynamo of economic growth and locus of power is focused increasingly in cities. Three recent books have put cities in the spotlight of global civilisation: Joel Kotkin's *The City: A History,* Doreen Massey's *World City* and PD Smith's *City: A Guidebook for the Urban Age.* The authors demonstrate how world and global cities have become beacons of a new urban golden age, the drivers of global development, the benchmarks of quality living, the voices of creativity and the future addresses of global population. Therefore, Singapore epitomises this new urban landscape of cosmopolitanism, gastronomical delights, multilingual voices, multi-religious sacred places, modern-traditional blending, garden-city living delights and the Asian-Western cultural fusion. Is Singapore the future model for global cities and can this experiment be sustained?

Explaining Singapore's Success Narrative

What countries want to learn from the Singapore experience is often seen as uncovering the black box of development success. Is there indeed a black box and state secret to national development success? In this age of globalisation and transparency, can countries hide their recipes for good development? Not really. The Singapore success story is predicated on many elements which all countries can emulate but it is difficult to influence and direct the confluence of elements for dedicated and spontaneous development goals and priorities. It begins with percipient leadership, pragmatic governance, non-corrupt leadership and a follow-up of investments in education, health, labour, infrastructure and housing, sustaining foreign inputs (in finance, management, skills and talents) and ensuring that the quality of life is perpetually prioritised. These are noble goals better achieved on paper than at the grassroots level.

At the end of the day, Singapore achieved success under rather strict authoritarian political rule which began by accident (the opposition having walked out) and later became ingeniously designed as part of the political process. However to

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be fair, the government delivered political, economic, social and environmental goods annually which provided landslide endorsements for the ruling party at elections for the first 30 years of independence. While successful countries can be found on both sides of the political spectrum, authoritarian governments can achieve rapid improvements if they are not undermined by rampant and endemic corruption. In the initial stages of development, correct and well-managed top-down government policies can go a long way in facilitating and focusing on development. This is best seen in Singapore's trust in short and long term planning (the state has plans for nearly every sector) which undergirded the leadership's control of the political process, management of Singapore's economic momentum and ability to respond to challenges nationally and internationally. Critics might find it hard to accept planning as a panacea for tackling problems, but Singapore's leadership has developed planning into a fine art of flexible responses to meet changes in a never-constant pie.

However, most of the successes of Singapore's story can be broadly nailed down to two underlying factors.

First, there was a willingness of the first-generation leaders to borrow ideas, policies, technologies and management systems from other countries, corporations and communities. Lee Kuan Yew unashamedly confessed that about 70 percent of Singapore's success story was adapted and learnt from elsewhere – states and corporations. The Singapore leadership strategy underscores what Austrian economist, Erik Reinert argued in his thought-provoking book, *How Rich Countries Got Rich …and Why Poor Countries Stay Poor.* Specifically, developing countries which are progressing economically have followed policies of 'emulation' and copying – borrowing policies, techniques, industries and programmes from successful developed countries. This European economist also argued that those countries following David Ricardo's 'comparative advantage' prescription have been doomed to economic stagnation. If Singapore followed the path of comparative advantage, the City-state would have still been a high-class supplier of raw materials and never taken off economically!

At the time of immediate post-colonialism, when developing states were busy finding their own independence, few leaders in the Third World saw the need to keep links with their developed colonial powers, much less learn from them. What became evident in the 1960s and 1970s were the saber-rattling calls of nationalism, xenophobic patriotism, the nationalisation of corporations, the indigenisation of street names and places and the severing of ties with colonial masters. The non-aligned movement was a demonstration of political

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independence by many Third World countries which Singapore remains a member of. In Latin America, this national movement, fed by Marxist arguments in Europe and at home created revolutionary calls to break the stranglehold of the capitalist system and colonial tentacles between satellite and master, between client and patron, between colonised and coloniser. The result was economic stagnation. Singapore's street and place names have remained old world and of colonial heritage, but its political software is Singaporean, its urban landscapes are modern, its cultural places are Asian and its society increasingly cosmopolitan.

Secondly, despite the global borrowings, Singapore could not have achieved its success and rapid development if it had not adopted independent policies. These policies were not revolutionary or even creative ideas – they were essentially pragmatic, down-to-earth calculations which proved to be radical at the time they were implemented. While the Third World countries were bent on embedding national and patriotic prescriptions, Singaporean leaders chose a different economic path. As most developing countries were closing their doors to foreign corporations, Singapore was welcoming them lock, stock and barrel to invest – the best marketing manager of Singapore Inc was none other than Lee Kuan Yew. His

perpetual annual formal visits to developed countries were always underscored by meetings with industrial and corporate titans. He was Singapore's best salesman because he believed in the Singapore product – perhaps with the foundations laid, we do not need a salesperson now as the city-state has become its own marketing asset.

Singapore thus has made major game changers in the path to development. It has made some creative contributions to traffic congestion with its Electronic Road Pricing system (ERP) by charging vehicles a toll in entering the central city area during peak periods, a system now adopted by other cities both in the developed and developing worlds. It has developed a 'garden city' and now a 'city-in-a-garden' system which has become a tourist attraction over the years. The iconic Marina Gardens by the Bay is the icing on the city-state's urban garden – a project which garnered the World Building of the Year Award at the prestigious World Architecture Festival (WAF) Awards 2012. Indeed, its 'clean and green' national campaigns have now become the best tourist attractions for the city-state. Its Night Safari is an iconic and ironic attraction in a heavily-developed urban landscape. Singapore's best environmental success has been its recycling of water making its very own 'mineral' water – NEWater. The success of Singapore water policies to

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be self sufficient (through recycling, conservation, desalination and reservoir development) would make it totally independent from Malaysian water dependence by 2061. This will be an amazing achievement for the city-state in eliminating its water footprint totally – one of the first countries and cities probably in the world to achieve this.

Reflections

This introduction to the thematic issue on Singapore as a brand name and idea is not meant to be comprehensive or exhaustive, nor was it aimed at summarising the contributions in this volume. In fact, I had written this introduction before the individual essays were received so as not to be influenced by what the contributors have said in their articles. This introduction is my personal take on Singapore's brand identity and the idea of Singapore. Indeed, every Singaporean will have his own ideas of what Singapore symbolises and best reveals. The best statements by Singaporeans on what their tiny city-state means to them often appears when they travel overseas. Unfortunately, however, such statements not only endorse positive nationalistic sentiments but also negative criticisms of other countries and cities. Hence citizens in neighbouring countries especially the Asian countries, often find

Singaporeans arrogant, boastful, pompous and smug. Singaporeans do feel a sense of pride about their city-state and it comes through in their touristic excursions expressed in a less tactful and sensitive manner. Even the fiercest Singaporean critics of the Singapore government and all its policies can end up being its staunchest supporters and defenders overseas. Singaporeans, in short, suffer from bi-polar nationalism.

The collection of essays in this volume of *Commentary* provides an interesting critical testimony to what different authors see as the successful Singapore experiment in nation building and urban development. I leave it to you to make your own judgements about the essays and this thematic issue of *Commentary*. Why this theme? There are many critical reviews by external authors, academics, reporters, tourists and politicians about the Singapore narrative in development – some negative and others positive. We thought it was opportune to hear from the views within our island country – here are the voices of Singaporeans critically reviewing their own city-state's achievements and pitfalls. Hopefully these articles will elicit discussion, engage debate and activate you to pen your own thoughts about the Singapore story. Every Singaporean, well known or unknown, has a story to tell, an anecdote to share and a viewpoint to express. You have

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the right to challenge conventional views and provide your own perspective. In the process, your perspective will engage dialogue and help to ensure a spirit of democratic discussion for enhancing the Singapore brand and achieving creative ideas for the future well-being of Singaporeans. Singapore is after all a project in process, fed by each generation's contributions and ideas. The idea of Singapore is here to stay in the global commons if Singaporeans continue to strive to make it so; though critics might take exception to the quest for 'perfection'. This is best summed up in the words of then PM Lee Kuan Yew on 6 February 1969 to mark the 150th anniversary of Singapore's founding:

"Singapore has been and will remain more than a place on the map. It will give cause for satisfaction to all those who chart man's progress and who will find corroboration in Singapore's performance that this climb up the face of the cliff to higher levels of civilisation, to a better life in a more gracious world, depends on man's constant and ceaseless striving for new and higher goals, depends on man's restless, organised, and unending search for perfection."

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**Brand Singapore: Sustaining a
City-state Political Economy**

Singapore's
Nation Branding

*By **Lai Szu Hao***

Singapore's Nation Branding

Introduction

Although a nation is not a commercial product, it has always existed as a brand. Nation branding is essentially about reputation management. With global country or city rankings on countless themes, interest in the idea and practice of nation branding has intensified over the past decade. Today, more and more governments around the world are trying to exploit the branding concepts long employed by business corporations in their efforts to manage their national standing across diverse sectors and interests – from boosting tourism and exports, attracting international capital, to improving foreign relations. Likewise, the Singapore government has been actively cultivating the city-state's reputation as a leading global city to attract capital and talent to propel its growth. Indeed, it could be argued that Singapore has embarked on this marketing strategy since it decided to treat the world as its hinterland upon separation from Malaysia in 1965. The overarching goal has been to develop and strengthen its position as a hub intertwined within the larger interconnections of cities and states globally.

What It Takes to Build a Strong Nation Brand

While nations have always aspired to promote their economic, diplomatic as well as military interests, it is only recently that they have resorted to the use of branding strategies as practised in the commercial world. But branding a nation is a far more complicated job than selling fizzy carbonated water. Unlike a commercial product, a nation cannot simply assume a brand identity by discarding its historical baggage overnight. It must also deal with existing international opinions of itself in its quest to promote a new image. There is also a need to consider the difficult trade-offs on the domestic front due to diverse and conflicting interests of various stakeholders. Perhaps, truly successful nation branding could be achieved only with concerted efforts and whole-of-nation coordination. In the case of Singapore, the Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts (MICA[1]) and the Ministry of Trade and Industry (MTI) co-chair the National Marketing Action Committee (NMAC), set up to encourage a whole-of-government approach to improve the overall brand equity of the city-state in the international arena. "NMAC takes the lead in formulating a national marketing platform to achieve a consistent and

[1] The Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts (MICA) was renamed the Ministry of Communications and Information (MCI) on 1 November 2012. MCI oversees the development of the infocomm technology, media and design sectors; the national and public libraries; as well as the Government's information and public communication policies.

compelling Singapore brand. It also serves to align and synergise marketing efforts of government agencies venturing aboard."[2]

Notwithstanding the limitations of commercial strategies in nation branding, many governments still engage public relations agencies and mobilise resources to create strong brands and images for their countries. Recently, MICA put up a tender to invite public relations companies to submit plans to enhance external perceptions of the city-state.[3] The plan would complement existing efforts from government agencies and profile Singapore as one of Asia's most liveable cities. However, to achieve success in this new branding exercise, it is necessary to set a focussed and credible brand narrative by highlighting a key attribute of Singapore that has an emotional connection with the public. It is also critical that all public sector agencies are aware of the brand message and their public communications should consistently reflect the values of the brand.

Some nation-branding consultants have underscored the benefits of strengthening coordination between the tourism and other government agencies to institute 'umbrella positioning' for a country so as to cultivate a multi-dimensional image in the mind of the audience and avoid stereotyping. However, the image put up by the tourism agency may not be compatible with other national objectives. Furthermore, an approach that aims to find a broad consensus could end up delivering a message that lacks credibility and depth. It could also dilute an existing proposition that is already unique and compelling. Thus, an 'umbrella marketing' campaign may not be able to contribute to the building of a national brand that is highly differentiated in the competitive global market.

Indeed, the focus on marketing a national brand is grossly insufficient and reality must live up to perception. People change their opinion of a country because of real and observable changes. Australia's international image changed for the better after it progressively dismantled 'White Australia' policy from the 1950s to 1973 when the Australian Citizenship Act of that year declared that all migrants were to be accorded equal treatment. Likewise, Japan's image improved after the Pacific War because it transformed itself from a militaristic state into a peaceful economic powerhouse that produced coveted consumer goods. It takes years to build a great brand, which could be destroyed overnight. For example, the image of Dubai suffered greatly due to its massive

[2] MICA Annual Report 2009, retrieved from http://app.mica.gov.sg/internet/report/2009/voices-content.swf, accessed 1 October 2012.

[3] *The New Paper*, 27 September 2012.

debt problem in 2009. With little oil in the emirate, Dubai's rapid economic growth prior to its debt crisis was mainly driven by its property sector. When the property bubble burst, the legend of how the emirate transformed itself from an obscure fishing village and port to one of the world's fastest-growing and sophisticated cities within a generation was also shattered.

The brand positioning that Singapore has erected since 1965 is strong, credible and indisputable: Singapore is a business hub connected to the world. Generally, the city-state has enjoyed international credibility and trustworthiness due to:

- an efficient and largely corruption-free government
- a transparent and enforceable legal system
- a well-educated and skilled workforce
- political stability and social harmony.

A robust country brand is like a rising tide that lifts all boats. This is clearly illustrated by 'country-of-origin' effect. By and large, a country with a positive international image faces less difficulty in promoting its goods and services compared to another country with a weaker image. As a result, their companies and products are perceived and valued differently. 'Trust' also commands a premium in the market, especially under the current international climate of uncertainty and volatility. This explains why many multi-national corporations still continue to see Singapore as an attractive investment destination in industries like finance and pharmaceutical despite its higher cost structure. Apparently, a robust country brand could be a source of economic value and global competitive advantage.

Brand Singapore – Predominantly Engineered and Driven by the Government

The government has played an instrumental role in moulding Singapore's nation branding, facilitated by one-party-dominant rule since 1965. Indeed, among the First World countries, Singapore could be considered an exceptional case where the citizens have vested the government with the mandate to be the guardian of nation branding, most visibly in critical areas like resource allocation and public communications.[4] The extent of government involvement in nation branding was rather apparent when Singapore hosted the IMF-World Bank meetings in 2006. The Singapore 2006 Organising Committee formulated the tagline 'Singapore: Global City, World of Opportunities' and even launched the 'Four Million Smiles' advertising campaign to encourage Singaporeans to smile more and present the city-state's

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[4] Koh Buck Song (2012), *Brand Singapore: How Nation Branding Built Asia's Leading Global City*, p 33.

best face to the world. However, national campaigns of such nature could have unintentionally reinforced international media's perception of Singapore as a 'nanny state' that interferes in Singaporeans' private lives via various tools of social control.

Arguably, the underlying reason for the attractiveness of Brand Singapore today is the city-state's successful developmental experience. In 1992, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) established the Singapore Cooperation Programme to facilitate sharing of technical and systems skills that it has acquired over the years with other developing countries. Singapore's innovative ways to address the challenges of urbanisation and water shortages which have been showcased using platforms such as the World Cities Summit and the International Water Week could also generate soft power and help the city-state to punch above its weight.

Public Sector Expertise for Export

Singapore's developmental success despite its small size and resource constraints has often been attributed to its effective governance and robust public policies. Hence, many regional countries such as China, India and Vietnam have expressed great interest in learning Singapore's expertise in infrastructure development and management and more recently, in

urban governance. The government understands that Singapore's traditional competitive advantages such as reasonable operational costs and good infrastructure are being gradually eroded and it is critical to strengthen the city-state's brand value to grow its external economic wing and national income. Since the 1990s, Singapore has provided consultancy services to other countries in areas like urban planning and construction of industrial parks. This is unambiguous acknowledgement that Singapore's brand of management and governance is a tested product that attracts international attention.

One well-publicised case of Government-to-Government (G-to-G) cooperation in China was the Suzhou Industrial Park project. This project was undertaken in 1994 with the objective of bringing Singapore's style of economic and industrial management to China. Although there has been much controversy in the media as to whether the cooperation was a success, the project remains a classic example of how a small state like Singapore has managed to spread its influence into another country via the flows of capital and expertise. In 2007, Singapore and China embarked on the second flag-ship G-to-G project – the Tianjin Eco-city. This project provides a platform for both countries to share expertise and experience in areas like urban planning, environmental protection, resource conservation, water and

waste management and sustainable development, as well as policies and programmes to engender social harmony.[5] Such G-to-G projects would strengthen Singapore's brand presence in China and generate spin-off opportunities for some local enterprises.

Apart from potential economic benefit, there could be significant intangible gains from exporting Singapore's public sector expertise. These encompass goodwill from partnering countries and widening of Singapore's influence on the international stage. Such activities could strengthen Singapore's soft power in the longer term to fight its major 'perception deficits', one of which is the country's perceived arrogance and predatory behaviour in the region. As Professor Kishore Mahbubani once commented, one of Singapore's biggest challenges is to demonstrate to its neighbours that the old image of the island "as a parasite on the region is wrong".[6] Singapore has to persuade its neighbours that its economic role is not that of "a middleman taking a cut" but it "actually adds value to the region".[7]

From 'Garden City' to 'City in a Garden'

Singapore's city planning concept has also been packaged into a national brand and marketed for economic and other intangible benefits. For example, the 'Garden City' branding could be regarded as the most successful brand proposition in the minds of both Singaporeans and foreign visitors alike. There are many places in the world where nature is celebrated, but Singapore's unique characteristic is her deliberate integration of flora into its cityscape. The effort to plant more trees here continues today. Even as global warming intensifies and the island is located near the equator, Singapore is still relatively cooler than other regional countries due to tree canopies flanking its streets and towns. This is something people take for granted until they visit the towns and cities in the neighbouring countries and experience the blistering heat of tropical climate.

To build on the old 'Garden City' theme and enhance Singapore's reputation as one of the world's most liveable cities, the government has again gone for bold and shrewd statement in rebranding itself as 'City in a Garden'. As former Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew noted, "Many countries now do tree planting and call themselves garden cities. To retain our edge and continue to improve our living environment, we have been transforming Singapore into a city in a garden. This city in a garden

[5] Retrieved from http://www.tianjinecocity.gov.sg/bg_intro.htm.
[6] *The Business Times*, 22 March 2007.
[7] Ibid.

vision is not just about developing green infrastructure. We are actually building a home to be proud of, in the next few decades."[8]

The opening of the Gardens by the Bay in July 2012 has provided an excellent platform for projecting national branding along the theme of 'City in a Garden'. In the main garden (Bay South), the ecological functions of the two conservatories and sustainable energy designs of the artificial 'SuperTrees' demonstrate Singapore's leading capability in large-scale park design. Being recognised as a leader in greening is a valuable asset in today's world due to rising concerns over rapid urbanisation as well as climate change. The current global attention on liveability and sustainability thus provides a great opportunity for Singapore to be a showcase of coordinated city planning that integrates greenery in an inspiring fashion. Surely, the city-state's green pedigree could be considered a distinct brand that runs parallel to the story of independent Singapore.

Can Singaporeans Contribute to the National Brand?

Despite the dominant role of the government in shaping the Singapore brand as it mobilises both resources and people to build the nation and its economy, every Singaporean can still contribute something to the national image. For example, a hotel receptionist or taxi driver who provides service with a smile and is able to answer enquiries from international visitors adeptly is actually making a difference to Brand Singapore. Hence nation branding, like nation building, could also be a people's project if the individuals are willing to take ownership. Such a development could strengthen the authenticity of Brand Singapore and at the same time, raise the national consciousness of Singaporeans. This is achievable because the socialisation in schools and during national service (for male citizens) has largely prepared Singaporeans to navigate and engage with a multicultural environment and this will facilitate meaningful interaction with people from different parts of the world.

Singapore can also capitalise on the brand equity of leading Singaporean companies such as Keppel Corporation, Fraser & Neave, CapitaLand, OCBC *et cetera* to boost its nation branding. The most obvious way to do this is to raise international awareness that these leading companies are indeed Singaporean. Simultaneously, when Singapore enjoys a robust international reputation, this could open up more business opportunities to Singaporean companies.

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[8] Let's build a "city in a garden" home together, posted 14 November 2011, retrieved from http://www.channelnewsasia.com/stories/singaporelocalnews/view/1165353/1/.html.

Singapore's Nation Branding

Apparently, the government recognises that one of Singapore's most potent resources is the ideas of its people. If the current Public Service's message to encourage 'co-creation' materialises, this could bring about greater innovation, stronger community bonding and a bottom-up input to a country brand that is already renowned for its existing attributes of efficiency and reliability. Thus nation branding is not merely about colourful advertising with cool taglines or national campaigns that mobilise massive state resources. Singaporeans can also be effective brand ambassadors for the country – by projecting who they really are and aspire to achieve as a people and nation. Ultimately, Singaporeans are the ones who embody the nation brand perpetually and securing their buy-in is critical for the success of the brand.

Epilogue

The Singapore Story is essentially a depiction of how an 'unexpected' state has progressed from Third World to First by virtue of its political will, pragmatic institutional development and meticulous urban planning. As a result, many developing states have been inspired by the Singapore Story and they hope to replicate its success by emulating the fundamentals of good governance. In other words, the premium commanded by Brand Singapore today could be attributed to its effective governance, high quality of life as well as social stability. But does Singapore also possess the capability to stir up the emotive aspects of a brand which could truly differentiate it from the rest? What lessons could be distilled from its past experiences (especially those pertaining to processes and structures) in nation branding?

It is also pertinent to bear in mind that just like any commercial brand, a successful nation brand is one that is built to last. As such, constant re-inventions could be counter-productive. How and what resources are really needed for the city-state to build an enduring brand?

Paradoxically, Singapore's openness to the forces of globalisation could contradict its agenda of nation building. Can it retain its national identity while aspiring to be a global city that values mobility and embraces foreign talent? If the answer is 'yes', Singapore can develop a top country brand with robust self-image.

About the Author

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**Brand Singapore: Sustaining a
City-state Political Economy**

The Singapore Story:
The Writing &
Rewriting of a History

*By **Kwa Chong Guan***

The Singapore Story: The Writing & Rewriting of a History

In 1987, Mr S Rajaratnam, then Senior Minister in the Prime Minister's Office, confidently declared that "until very recently, Singapore's past was a matter of supreme indifference for most Singaporeans because they believed this island never really had a history remembering." As Rajaratnam pointed out, "our history began in 1819 when Raffles landed in swampy Singapore with some 40 to 50 unremarkable kampong houses and no more than 400 Malays, Orang Laut and a sprinkling of very lost Chinese. This is not the stuff which enthralling history is made out of. Nothing very much appears to have happened in Singapore – if anything happened at all – before Raffles landed in this unpromising island." The argument Rajaratnam was leading up to, was that "though our history began in 1819, this brief past is what made Singapore and its people what they are today, and it is this Singapore's past which will shape their future and furnish the ingredients for a national identity."[1]

On hindsight, Rajaratnam has played a lead role in reconstructing Singapore's past to "shape its future and furnish the ingredients for a national identity." In a little-known and underappreciated 1965 reflection on the PAP's First Ten Years in Power, Rajaratnam outlined the kernel of what has become the Singapore story.

Rajaratnam assured People's Action Party (PAP) members that the Party had much to be proud of on its 10th anniversary. Writing in the midst of a political crisis in relations with Kuala Lumpur, Rajaratnam could still confidently declare that the Party had "achieved one of its fundamental aims: The independence of Singapore through merger with the Federation of Malaya." In an oblique reference to the ongoing political crisis the Party was embroiled in, Rajaratnam claimed that the PAP had been able to "thwart the manoeuvres of both the right-wing reactionaries and the communist on the far left with a fair degree of success."[2]

Rajaratnam recounted the founding of the Party in the basement dining room of Lee Kuan Yew's Oxley Road residence and what prompted a group of politically inexperienced neophytes to try to establish a new left-wing party against better-established political parties in an increasingly divided political arena. The bulk of reflections outlined the dilemmas and choices the Party faced as it decided how to progress its agenda without being co-opted by other right-wing parties or subverted by the Communist. In terms of genres of stories, Rajaratnam's story of the PAP takes the form of a romance, as it has all the elements of a heroic romance, like Edmund Spenser's

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[1] Rajaratnam's speech at an old National Museum Gallery exhibition, reprinted in Kwa Chong Guan (ed) (2006), *S Rajaratnam on Singapore: From Ideas to Reality,* Singapore: World Scientific Publishing & Institute of Defence & Strategic Studies), p 264.
[2] *PAP's First Ten Years in Power,* reprinted in *Rajaratnam on Singapore*, pp 180-226.

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narrative of the quest of St George in *The Faerie Queene*, of a perilous journey undertaken in fulfilment of a quest for a grail, or in this case, a vision for a democratic socialist society. This journey culminates in an epic struggle with the Communist, in which either the hero, his foe, or both, must die. In this case, fortunately the hero was victorious in the 1963 elections.

However this heroic struggle against colonialism, communism and communalism for Singapore's place in a "Malaysian Malaysia" ended in the tragedy of Separation. Whereas the PAP leaders may have put behind them the trauma of 9 August 1965 as a foundational historical event, the experience of that tragedy continued to haunt them and their vision for Singapore, like Hamlet haunted and driven by his father's ghost to a tragic conclusion. The PAP leaders acted to exorcise the ghost of Separation by disproving the deeply-held historical assumption that Singapore, divorced from its peninsula hinterland, would collapse and prove instead that Singapore as a city-state could survive the odds.

By 1973, Singapore's dependence upon its traditional staple port functions of financing, processing, marketing and exporting the staple products of the Malay Peninsula and the archipelago had been broken. Export of Singapore's manufactures and expansion of financial and other business services underpinned a growing Singapore economy. Rajaratnam could confidently explain to the Singapore Press Club in 1972 why Singapore was proving its critics and other pessimists who believed that separated from its peninsula hinterland, Singapore would collapse. Singapore according to Rajaratnam, was transforming itself from a "trading city of Southeast Asia, the market place of the region ... into a new kind of city – the Global City."[3] In making this claim, Rajaratnam was prescient, for the end of the Cold War which would enable a new cycle of globalisation and the emergence of a new global economy networked around a number of world cities, was twenty years in the future.

By the early 1980s, Singapore was taxiing down the runway to economic takeoff. Rajaratnam and his colleagues could again reflect and reconfigure their memories of why Singapore had not failed, for in their recollections, the odds were stacked against it and Singapore should have failed. Declaring open an $18 million 'National Exhibition' to celebrate 25 years of independence in 1984, then Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew rhetorically asked, "We survived. Later, we prospered. How did it happen? The basic attributes of nationhood were missing. We were groups of diverse and different peoples. We had no common

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[3] Singapore: Global City, reprinted in *Rajaratnam on Singapore,* pp 227-237.

past. We had no common language, culture or religion. We did not have 'the social glue' to hold together as a nation." This 'National Exhibition' and a series of other exhibitions at the old National Museum and the National Archives over the next decade developed this story of how Singapore survived and developed against the odds.

However, contained in this story of survival and development were the seeds of its unravelling. For as Singapore developed, it also forgot its past. Urban redevelopment removed landmarks that were sites of memories and history. New memories of redeveloped sites such as Raffles Place or Orchard Road had little, if any, connection with memories of the old Raffles Place or Orchard Road. The Housing & Development Board (HDB) estates developed in the 1970s and 1980s are unmemorable compared to the old *kampongs*. A new ordering of our work, social and family lives reconfigured the old social memories we inherited. The political, tumultuous and economically uncertain past could be forgotten in the prosperous and stable present. A post-1965 generation of Singaporeans grew up learning to forget the past of their parents as new social memories were created.

In 1996, then Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong raised the alarm when he realised that "younger Singaporeans knew very little of the events and issues surrounding our independence." Goh pointed out that "not knowing the circumstances of Singapore's birth is a serious gap in knowledge … of how we became a nation, and the principles of meritocracy and multiracialism which underpin our entire society and political culture." To rectify this, Goh proposed a National Education Programme to "engender a shared sense of nationhood, an understanding of how our past is relevant to our present and future. It must appeal to both heart and mind." The National Education Programme which was launched the following year by then Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, has today become a major component of a more holistic national education curriculum with the Singapore story as its bedrock.[4]

The Singapore story of how it succeeded against the odds to become a nation took definite shape in a multimillion dollar exhibition launch in July 1998. *The Singapore Story: Overcoming the Odds* moved its visitors in a people-mover around a series of tableaux depicting Singapore's historical development from the hardship of the Japanese Occupation through the post-

[4] Ministry of Education (MOE) National Education (NE) www.ne.edu.sg, PM Goh and DPM Lee on National Education, Ministry of Education (MOE) & National Education (NE), retrieved from www.ne.edu.sg[speeches]. Also note additional NE information retrieved from Ministry of Defence (MINDEF), www.nexus.gov.sg.

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World War II anti-colonial struggle for independence, and fight against Communism to negotiations to form Malaysia. How Singapore responded to the dire political and economic challenges confronting the nascent city-state after Separation from the Federation is depicted in the concluding section of this exhibition. This story has been recounted in detail and finesse by Lee Kuan Yew in his two-volume *memoire*.

The story was further consolidated in an audio-visual documentary proposed by then Prime Minister Goh to honour Lee Kuan Yew on his 80th birthday in 2003. Two years in the making, the three-hour multimillion dollar documentary produced by Discovery Channel Asia was broadcast on 4 and 5 December 2005 as a commemoration of Singapore's 40th anniversary. The underlying theme of this documentary was that Singapore's transformation from *Mangrove to Metropolis,* as the documentary was entitled, was in large part driven by the vision of a series of 'Great Men' from Sir Stamford Raffles to Lee Kuan Yew.

The Singapore Story, as a story structured around heroes and villains, attributes to the PAP leaders the vision, leadership and gumption to lead Singapore through its anti-colonial

struggle to independence in a merger to form Malaysia and then through the trauma of Separation to survive and prosper. This rationale for making the story of the PAP the plot of *The Singapore Story* was articulated by Rajaratnam in his address at a 1984 Pre-University Seminar. Rajaratnam provocatively asked his audience, "If not the Singapore created by the PAP, then what kind of Singapore would have emerged in its place?" Rajaratnam's response to his counterfactual question was to paint to his audience in his usual purple prose, the dark hues of a communist Singapore.[5] *Men in White* by Sonny Yap, Richard Lim and Leong Weng Kam reworks in detail this articulation of the PAP with Singapore's history.

As a genre of writing about the past in terms of the 'Great Men' who made history, *The Singapore Story* is not unusual, but it does raise a number of issues. The first issue is that it evokes a response from those vanquished or castigated as communist to argue for their version of the past and their place in history. Poh Soo Kai, Tan Jing Quee and Koh Kay Yew have invited some of their fellow political activists to join them in reflecting on their place in history.[6] Poh's reflections on his detention in Operation Cold Store in 1963 offer an alternative reconstruction of the event to that in *The*

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[5] Birth of a Nation, *Rajaratnam on Singapore,* p 263.
[6] Poh Soo Kai, Tan Jing Quee & Koh Kay Yew (eds) (2010), *The Fajar Generation: The University Socialist Club and the Politics of Postwar Malaya and Singapore*, Petaling Jaya: Strategic Information and Research Development Centre.

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Singapore Story. Tan Jing Quee has also collaborated with Tan Kok Chiang and Hong Lysa to offer an alternative interpretation of Chinese school activism as a struggle over issues of their identity as Chinese/Malayan/Singaporean.[7] Others, like Fong Chong Pik, whom some of us recognise as the 'Plen' Lee Kuan Yew met, has written his memoirs,[8] as has Said Zahari.[9]   Lim Chin Siong has been remembered by his comrades in a series of tributes as a *Comet in Our Sky.*[10]

The second issue is the critical examination of the historiography of this Singapore story by a younger generation of historians. Hong Lysa and Huang Jianli lead in their critique of *The Scripting of a National History.*[11] *Paths Not Taken: Political Pluralism in Post-War Singapore* edited by Michel D Barr and Carl Trocki[12] brings together a wider range of Singapore and other scholars to examine the possibilities of history which the

1950s and 1960s offered. Loh Kah Seng and Liew Kai Khiun have brought together a group of younger historians to discuss the issues and difficulties they encountered in attempting to get past *The Makers & Keepers of Singapore History*[13] to reconstruct other multiple understandings of our past with the Singapore story as one such understanding. A number of blogs and online journals such as *s/pores*, have emerged to join this examination of the writing of Singapore history.

Complementing this examination of the historiography of the Singapore story is the attempt to reframe this Singapore story in a wider spatial context and longer temporal span. Derek Heng has been developing this approach to Singapore's past.[14] He had earlier joined Tan Tai Yong and the author of this essay to argue that Singapore has a 700-year history.[15]   This reconstruction of a 700-

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[7] Tan Jing Quee, Tan Kok Chiang & Hong Lysa (eds) (2011), *The May 13 Generation; The Chinese Middle Schools Student Movement and Singapore Politics in the 1950s*, Petaling Jaya: Strategic Information and Research Development Centre.

[8] Fong Chong Pik (2008), *The Memoirs of a Malayan Communist Revolutionary,* Petaling Jaya: Strategic Information and Research Development Centre.

[9] Zahari, Said (2007), *The Long Nightmare: My 17 Years as a Political Prisoner*, Kuala Lumpur: Utusan Publications.

[10] Tan Jing Quee & Jomo K S (eds) (2001), *Comet in Our Sky: Lim Chiong Siong in History,* Kuala Lumpur: INSAN.

[11] Hong Lysa & Huang Jianli (2008), *The Scripting of a National History: Singapore and Its Pasts,* Singapore: NUS Press.

[12] Barr, MD & Trocki, CA (eds) (2008), *Paths Not Taken: Political Pluralism in Post-war Singapore,* Singapore: NUS Press.

[13] Loh Kah Seng & Liew Kai Khiun (eds) (2010), *The Makers & Keepers of Singapore History,* Singapore: Ethos Books/Singapore Heritage Society.

[14] Heng Thiam Soon Derek (ed) (2006), *New perspectives and sources on the history of Singapore: A multi-disciplinary approach,* Singapore: National Library Board; Heng Thiam Soon Derek & Syed Muhd Khairudin Aljunied (eds) (2009), *Reframing Singapore: Memory-Identity-Trans-Regionalism,* Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press/ICAS Publ.6; Heng Thiam Soon Derek & Syed Muhd Khairudin Aljunied (eds) (2011), *Singapore in Global History,* Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press/ICAS Publ.14.

[15] Kwa Chong Guan, Heng Thiam Soon Derek & Tan Tai Yong (2009), *Singapore: A 700-year history: From Early Emporium to World City,* Singapore: National Archives of Singapore.

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year history for Singapore is based in large part on the archaeological excavations undertaken by John Miksic since 1984 and the pioneering work of Peter Borschberg on 17th century Portuguese-Dutch rivalry for control of the waters of Singapore and Melaka Straits.[16]

A third set of issue the Singapore Story evokes is the experience and social memories of living out the narrative of the Singapore Story. As a pioneering generation of poets, dramatists and artists have impressed in their art forms their experiences of the anti-colonial struggle they lived through in the 1950s and 1960s; so too a post-1965 generation of artists, dramatists and poets, and now, film directors, are recording their experiences of living the Singapore Story. Alfian Saat agonises about his identity in multiethnic and multicultural Singapore in his poetry. Tan Pin Pin deploys her cinematic skills to document the trauma of relocating from an old *kampong* to a modern HDB flat or the spatial justice of exhuming an old cemetery.

The Singapore Story has become an integral component of Singapore's identity today. As such, this essay argues, the Singapore Story is contemporary history, which the Italian historian and philosopher Benedetto Croce defined as 'living history' of those who had a part in the making of that history or were a witness to it. It is a justification of that immediate past for the present and projection into lessons and prospects for the future. Narrating the end of the Cold War raises issues of the triumphalism of Democracy and the 'End of History' as Francis Fukuyama once expressed it. This raises issues of the visions of social and spatial justice embedded in any narrative of contemporary history. Visions of a meritocratic, multiethnic and multicultural society underpin the Singapore Story and raises issues of the translation of those visions into government policies and plans. The controversy over the preservation of the cemetery on Bukit Brown or earlier, the redevelopment of Chinatown, or quotas of foreign labour are contestations over the policy implications of progress and equality embedded in The Singapore Story of Singapore's transformation from a colonial port city to a city-state and into a global city today.

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[16] Miksic JN & Low Mei Gek C-A (eds) (2004), *Early Singapore, 1300s-1819: Evidence in maps, text and artefacts,* Singapore: Singapore History Museum; Borschberg, P (2010), *The Singapore and Melaka Straits; Violence, Security and Diplomacy in the 17th Century,* Singapore: NUS Press.

Brand Singapore: Sustaining a City-state Political Economy

The Singapore Recipe for Sustainability

*By **Lee Soo Ann***

The Singapore Recipe for Sustainability

In writing *Singapore: From Place to Nation* (2nd edition: Pearson Singapore 2011, p 224) for my undergraduate students, I came to the paradoxical conclusion that Singapore is no more than a place where foreigners sustain foreigners. I had thought that my conclusion would be that Singapore is now a nation and not just a place where Sir Stamford Raffles planted the British flag in 1819. Singapore today is now a nation but one where foreigners sustain foreigners in economic terms. More accurately, it is a case of one kind of foreigner sustaining another kind. I may write a third edition next year, to address the years when Singapore was occupied by the Japanese and also the prevalence of income inequality now. The concluding chapter may well be that Singapore has come full circle from being a nation to being a place again, where there are relatively few indigenous inhabitants. What sustains Singapore then, in its last 200 years?

During the British trading settlement in 1819, Singapore was established by the East India Company out of maritime rivalry between the British and the Dutch at that time. Britain had returned Malacca to the Dutch in 1815 after the Napoleonic wars and the China trade was opening up. However, located at the narrowest part of the Straits of Malacca, the Dutch had a chokehold on shipping going to China unless the British could establish a station south of Malacca. It was with the purpose of establishing such

a station that Raffles sailed from Penang. He found the Dutch in Riau and the Kerimun islands unsuitable for lack of water. However, he had heard of Temasek from the Malay Annals which he could read from his knowledge of Malay acquired from the governor of Java before 1815. Consequently he sailed to the mouth of the Singapore river and as the saying goes, the rest is history.

The Singapore location at the tip of the Malay Peninsula gave sailing ships an advantage when resting between the two monsoons, unlike resting in Penang which was already British as it was too far north. With free trade as opposed to taxed trade imposed in Dutch ports in Southeast Asia, Singapore blossomed in the next fifty years. That location further enabled Singapore to benefit from the discovery of tin in the foothills of the Peninsula in the 1870s and the rubber boom which followed in the 1900s.

Chinese junks used to sail from China to Southeast Asia from Zheng He's time, and Singapore was a natural landing place for the many Chinese who sailed or shipped from the southeast provinces of imperial China to the prosperity in the Peninsula arising from tin and rubber. The Chinese had been in Southeast Asia for many centuries before the British came, there being settlements in Kalimantan for example, and these Chinese gravitated to Singapore when free trade was established. The Chinese in Penang and Malacca were of course among the

first to do so as these places were already British.

Location on the Straits of Malacca route to Australia and New Zealand gave Singapore a further advantage when the telegraph and the telephone linked Britain to these British colonies. With the shift to steam from sailing ships, Singapore became a coaling depot for ships sailing to Japan and China as well. The discovery of oil in Sumatra and Singapore's proximity to oil fields in Sarawak made Singapore into an oil distribution centre.

One may tentatively conclude that the prime maritime location of Singapore is responsible for its success in its first hundred years as a British territory especially when this coincided with the 19th century being Pax Brittanica when the British Empire reached its zenith. However, the location of Singapore has never changed. What did change was the capacity of foreigners to meet foreigners in Singapore in safety and to make a living for themselves. The Anglo-Dutch treaty of 1824 ensured that Dutch rivalry did not menace the economic growth of Singapore. The Dutch had all of the 7,000 islands of what is now Indonesia to grapple with.

Foreigners meeting foreigners is not a new concept but British rule was impartial in its indifference to the cultures that met. When these foreigners brought with them different currencies (silver from Spain through the Phillipines via Mexico, rupees from British India and guilders from Dutch Southeast Asia), the British government introduced an element of stability (through pressure from the business community) in the medium of exchange by the institution of the straits dollar which had a stable rate of exchange to pound sterling from 1906 to 1967. The stable straits dollar gave birth to local banks which complemented the previous dominance by British exchange banks (so called because they stood ready to exchange various currencies into pound sterling).

The British left each ethnic community to largely police themselves and the growth of free trade was accompanied by the free inflow and outflow of people. Only during the 1930s depression was there a limit on the number of males allowed in otherwise there would be even more severe unemployment and consequential social strains. Women however were not subject to quota, and considerable numbers came during the 1930s which contributed to equalising the sex ratio and the consequential formation of families and the baby boom of the 1940s and 1950s. The Japanese occupation of 1942-45 put a halt to immigration and so the post-WW II ideological conflict with communism as well, which meant that Chinese from China could no longer enter freely.

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The limited self-government in 1955 followed by full internal self-government in 1959 saw a different group of foreigners entering Singapore to play an active role and these were from the Federation of Malaya (formed in 1948 after an abortive Malayan Union in 1946-48). Singapore was a British colony until 1963 when it joined Malaysia and Britain allowed those 'upcountry' to enter Singapore. Many Malaysians entered Singapore after Singapore was separated from being part of the Straits Settlements of Penang and Malacca in 1946, but the reverse was not always so. After 1946, land was a state matter, whether under the Malayan Union or the Federation – more so after the Federation obtained independence in 1957 so that preference was given to ownership by its citizens.

The 1957 Citizenship Act created Singapore citizenship and many foreign-born residents of Singapore (especially those born in China) took advantage of the provision that they had stayed in Singapore for the past several years, to obtain citizenship. This explains why there were many pro-communist Singaporeans who entered politics. Many Malaysians who entered Singapore either before or after WW II took advantage of this provision to become Singapore citizens. It was only after 1965, when Singapore separated from Malaysia, that Singapore citizenship was more strictly granted.

The People's Action Party (PAP) government which came into power in 1959 had many of these foreign-born citizens. It was not a case of Singaporeans welcoming foreigners for many of the leaders of the PAP were from the Federation (in the 1959 cabinet, only one, Lee Kuan Yew, was born in Singapore!). It was a case of one kind of foreigners sustaining another kind, those born in the Federation sustaining those born in China, to put it in broad terms. Of course, there were Singaporeans born in Singapore but they were in the minority, for the simple reason that for the several decades before 1946, the majority of those residing in Singapore were males. In 1911, the percentage of Singapore island Chinese born in British Malaya was 20 percent. In 1947, the percentage of Singapore island Chinese born in British Malaya improved but was still only 40 percent. Relatively few babies were born in Singapore.

British Malaya meant Penang, Malacca and Singapore, for these were British territories, unlike the nine Malay States which were 'protected' by the British but still having their own sovereign sultans. If we were to remove those born in Penang and Malacca, the number of Singapore island Chinese born in Singapore would be much lower for those two census years. Singapore citizenship before 1957, if granted according to Straits Settlements rules, would be given only to those born in Singapore which would be a minority. Singapore is

essentially an immigrant society, a frontier town, and it was only during from the late 1940s onwards, with the onset of the baby boom, that those born in Singapore became more numerous.

However, these Singaporeans born in Singapore at that time were infants and children. They are now adults of course, but then another spurt in those foreign-born came from the 1980s onward. A major reason is the fright Singapore leaders had after separation in 1965, of the 1970 withdrawal of the British armed forces whose contribution to the economy was then estimated to be about 20 percent. The government initiated anti-natal (not antenatal) policies in 1970, which started with the legalisation of abortion and the encouragement given to small families due to a certain structure of incentives and disincentives. Abortions rose to one-third of pregnancies, and births fell. The level of abortions has now fallen, but is still around 10,000 a year, though the exact figure is not published. It is estimated that the total number of abortions over the last thirty two years is equal to the number of foreign workers we now have! Perhaps we would not have the need for such a high foreign worker population if abortion was not legalised. Be that as it may, other factors came into play which reduced the birth rate to the low 1.2 per thousand level it is now.

Rising educational opportunities for women meant that they could join the

workforce and seek further education for themselves, which limited them to the men whom they could look up to unless the men themselves became better or higher educated. Home ownership used to be of basic units but over the course of time, there was continuous upgrading with couples choosing to live 'beyond' their means, so that both husband and wife needed to work to pay off the mortgage. After the 1985 recession, the first major one after the 1965 separation, housing loan terms were extended from 20 to 30 years, as the Central Provident Fund (CPF) cut imposed to counter that recession meant that there was less in the monthly CPF contribution to pay off these loans. Couples saddled with long-term loans were less likely to want larger families.

What this meant was that the intake of foreigners had to be liberalised, from 'traditional' sources like Malaysia to 'non-traditional' sources like Thailand and Bangladesh for construction, the Philippines and Indonesia for domestic helpers and so on. The Foreign Worker Levy was introduced in 1990 to ensure that the cost to the employer of employing a foreigner would be equal to that of employing a Singaporean, but as this levy was in absolute and not percentage terms, it meant that eventually the cost of employing a foreigner would fall. And so it is today, that the wages required to attract a foreigner may be high for the foreigner, but low for the Singaporean, hence the

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wage level in Singapore tends to be set by the foreigner. There are quota limits in addition to the levy, to protect the Singaporean but the fact remains that the wage level for the average Singaporean has not risen much in the last ten years.

On paper, there are 3.5 million Singaporeans and 1.5 million foreigners, but these foreigners are largely working adults. However, only two million Singaporeans are working, the others being those who are old or young or still studying. It is true that foreigners are needed to sustain the Singapore economy but the Singapore economy is built up also of a substantial number of foreigners. Foreigners are helping to sustain foreigners! If we take into account the fact that a substantial portion of Singaporeans are actually foreign-born (either in China or India or some other place or Malaysia), the dominance of foreign foreigners is unquestioned. Singapore is now a place where foreigners meet and help each other, much like what it was then under British rule.

Those leading Singapore now can be likened to those who governed Singapore under British rule. This was largely a beneficent rule, for the British did not 'exploit' Singapore like what some other European powers did in their rule. Singapore did not have commodities or crops which could be supplied to the 'mother' country. Singapore was merely a place from where Britain managed its

economic interests in Southeast Asia, for not only was there Peninsular Malaya, but there were also Sarawak, Sabah and Brunei. Singapore had a substantial British army, air force and navy base as well, which at its peak, accounted for 20 percent of its economy. Those who governed Singapore now need to have the ability of the British to manage different kinds of foreigners, and of large numbers too.

In this talk about foreigners sustaining foreigners, who exactly is a foreigner? A new Singapore citizen is a foreigner if he or she was not born in Singapore and educated in a local primary or secondary school. What about the Singapore citizen who was born in Singapore and had Singapore-born parents?

These can be likened to indigenous people, much like what those in Malaysia termed 'bumiputra'. Of the 3.5 million citizens, I estimate that only about two million were born in Singapore. The other two million people are not born here – either they are citizens not born here or just foreigners, who were obviously not born in the state.

For Singapore to sustain itself in economic terms, we must not talk too much about citizens versus non-citizens. The real conflict may lie between those who were born here and those not. Many of those not born here have genuine aspirations to make Singapore their home and ensure that Singapore

succeeds. Many of them have now become citizens, perhaps some time ago, but are still 'foreigners', having not been born here. The majority of those not born here may have aspirations to become citizens.

Is there anything in Singapore's short history that we can learn from? Singapore had a minority born-in-Singapore group, some of whom contributed to the development of Singapore and some who did not. This minority was the Peranakan, so-called because their parents married in Singapore or in the Straits Settlements of Penang and Malacca. Some Peranakan reached out to the *sin-khek* (or new guests) so-called because they were the immigrants from China. Many Peranakans did not. Peranakan culture is essentially a closed culture, they being Chinese who assimilated the Malay culture. To some extent, they are similar to the Malay 'bumiputra' in Malaysia who cling on to their status as the indigenous people.

Among Singapore citizens today, I detect a freshness on the part of those who were born in Malaysia or China or anywhere else. However those born in Singapore tend to have a certain patronising attitude to those not born in Singapore. There is a difference because those born here not only cherish landmarks and other local paraphernalia not obvious to those not born here, but they also attended primary schools in

Singapore. Of course such ties between them strengthen if they go to the local secondary schools as well. It is said that what one learns when one is a child is remembered longest and best.

Such a patronising attitude can spill over into the workplace. Those citizens not born here would feel marginalised. They may go to the same local universities as those born here, but the ties that bind at the tertiary level are not that strong. Economic activity is best done when there is a spirit of camaraderie among those in the same firm or production process.

Those not born in Singapore, whether citizen or not, also have a strong camaraderie amongst themselves, if only because they did not go to the same primary school as those born here. My interpretation of Singapore's economic development is that this camaraderieship among those not born here, was largely responsible for the drive and the imagination which made Singapore what it is today. The economic growth and diversification of Singapore needs the integration of both sides of camaraderie. Ultimately it is not citizenship which counts. After all, citizenship is a relatively new concept and the requirements of becoming a citizen today are different from what they were in 1957. Then, the requirements were framed in terms of the drive towards self-determination on the part of those who wanted to vote. Today the requirements of citizenship

seem to be framed largely in terms of the contribution of the new citizen towards economic activity.

However, there is more to economic activity than mere citizenship in the same way that there is more to citizenship than just voting. The recipe for economic sustainability is more than just saving and investment. It requires people, both citizens and non-citizens, those born here and those not, to work together, share experiences, learn from each other and having a common vision for the future. There are many more choices that one can make now and that is why I tend to be pessimistic as to the economic sustainability of Singapore as a nation. Perhaps Singapore can be sustained better as a mere place!

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**Brand Singapore: Sustaining a
City-state Political Economy**

Singapore's Foreign Policy:
Unique Features

*By **Tommy Koh***

Singapore's Foreign Policy: Unique Features

Introduction

I am an accidental diplomat. I had intended to spend my life teaching law. However, by a twist of fate, I was asked to be our Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the United Nations (UN) in 1968. Although I did return to the National University of Singapore (NUS) Law School and served as its Dean from 1971 to 1974, I have spent most of my professional life with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. I have been an active participant in Singapore's diplomacy for 41 years. In this essay, drawing from my experience and reflections, I will identify and discuss three unique features of Singapore's foreign policy.

Small States in a Big World

Life for small States has never been easy. It was much harder before the founding of the UN in 1945. In the pre-UN world, the fate of small States was often decided by the big States of their region or of the world. Thus, it was not uncommon for the concert of powers to arbitrarily decide to alter the boundaries of small States or incorporate parts of small States into the territories of their bigger neighbours. In extreme cases, some small States simply disappeared as a result of being forcibly incorporated into the territory of a bigger neighbour. This happened to Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, which were incorporated by Stalin, against their will, into the Soviet Union.

Since the founding of the UN, the world has become a relatively safer place for small States. The UN Charter, the UN Security Council and the UN General Assembly are, however, unable to prevent a big State from invading a small State. The Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, the United States (US) invaded Grenada and Iraq, Russia invaded Georgia, just to give a few recent examples. Iraq invaded and attempted to incorporate Kuwait into Iraq. Kuwait was liberated by a coalition of like-minded States, led by the US, with the approval of the UN Security Council. Kuwait was fortunate in that it is the world's 10th largest oil producer. In each of the other cases, the invasions were the subject of deliberations, either in the Security Council or the General Assembly or both. The invasions were condemned by the Parliament of Man. The UN's capacity to prevent or rectify the aggression of big States against small States is, however, uncertain and limited. The bottom line is that small States continue to live in a dangerous world.

Be Proactive

One hallmark of Singapore's foreign policy is that, although a small State, we are not passive. On the contrary, we are hyper-proactive. Small States, like small boys, are expected to be silent, passive and compliant. Small States are seldom given a seat at the top table. Small States are seldom consulted by the big States.

They are usually told what to do by the big States. The norm is for small States to be reactive rather than proactive - to be the subject of the actions of the big States instead of being the actors and to accept their fate as small States. Singapore has defied the norm by being a proactive State. Let me cite three examples.

First, during the UN Conference on the Law of the Sea, Singapore found that the negotiations at the Conference were being dominated by the coastal States and the great powers. In order to gain leverage, Singapore took the initiative to establish a new grouping called the Group of Landlocked and Geographically Disadvantaged States. The group united the landlocked States and coastal countries which, like Singapore, were hemmed in by their neighbours. The group consisted of about one-third of the member States participating in the Conference. This gave us a voice and a weight which we would not have had otherwise.

A second example is the initiative which Singapore took at the UN, in 1992, to form the Forum of Small States (FOSS). The forum consists of 105 out of the 193 members of the UN. The criterion for membership is a population below 10 million. The forum has proven itself as an effective platform of small States. FOSS recently celebrated its 20th anniversary. The President of the UN General Assembly, the Secretary-General of the UN and the US Secretary of State, were among the guests who spoke at the forum. Singapore is the chairman of FOSS and the founder is Ambassador Chew Tai Soo.

Third, following the creation of G20, consisting of 20 major advanced and emerging economies of the world, Singapore feared that the interests of other States would not be taken into account. In response to this danger, Singapore took the initiative to establish a group of like-minded States, called the Global Governance Group or 3G. The group has succeeded in insisting on a linkage between G20 and the UN and has submitted policy papers to G20 for its consideration. As convener of 3G, Singapore has been invited to attend several G20 meetings. The founder of 3G is Ambassador Vanu Gopala Menon and the group has 30 members from all regions of the world.

Be Not Afraid

Another unique feature of Singapore's foreign policy is that it is not afraid to stand up for its interests. Small States are usually reluctant to take on a bigger opponent. Singapore has no such fear. Let me cite a few examples.

First, in 1972, a young Permanent Representative to the UN, Professor S Jayakumar, decided to take on very formidable opponents at the UN and prevailed against the odds. Let me

explain the facts. At that time, many coastal States, led by the Latin-Americans, were unilaterally making extensive claims to the sea. Some wanted the territorial sea to be expanded from three miles to 200 miles. Others wanted very extensive fisheries zones. In 1972, the *US Geographer* had published a report showing that the majority of the UN's member States would not benefit from such extensive claims. This prompted Professor Jayakumar to submit a draft resolution to the UN General Assembly requesting the Secretary-General to study how the various proposals put forward by the coastal States would impact on mankind's interests. The draft resolution was vehemently opposed by the powerful coastal States. France, Canada and Malta jointly submitted an amendment which, if adopted, would have killed the resolution. In the UN, it is called a 'killer amendment'. Miraculously, the vote was 46 in favour, 46 against, with 27 abstentions. Under the UN's rules of procedure, the amendment failed to be adopted by one vote. The resolution was adopted. Singapore's victory made the UN take notice of this small State and its effective diplomacy.

Second, Vietnam invaded and occupied Cambodia in December 1978. The five ASEAN countries decided to oppose Vietnam's action, not because it supported the odious Khmer Rouge regime, but because it would set a dangerous precedent. The fight in the UN General Assembly in 1979 was a cliffhanger. By taking on Vietnam, ASEAN was taking on the whole Soviet bloc as well as the leadership of the Non-Aligned Movement, including India. Many of our friends thought that our cause was hopeless. Contrary to such expectations, ASEAN prevailed. Eventually, when the Cold War ended, Vietnam agreed to withdraw from Cambodia and to seek a negotiated solution to the conflict. This resulted in the Paris Agreements of 1991.

Third, I would refer to Professor Jayakumar's book, *Diplomacy: A Singapore Experience*. In his book, the author discussed several cases in which Singapore came under tremendous pressure from the big powers, such as the US, China, United Kingdom and the European Union. In each case, Singapore refused to yield to the pressure. Singapore has shown that although we live in an unequal world, successful small countries can maintain their dignity and not give in to the unreasonable pressure of the big States.

Be Law Abiding

The third and most unique feature of Singapore's foreign policy is the priority we accord to international law. Most scholars of international affairs are puzzled by Singapore's behaviour. Singapore's leaders, from Lee Kuan Yew to the present, use a vocabulary which

suggests that Singapore adheres to the Realist school, which takes a cold-eyed, unsentimental view of the world. The Realist worships power and is usually dismissive of other considerations. How can a Realist State attach so much importance to international law?

Singapore's ideology is actually not Realism, but Pragmatism. Our adherence to international law is based upon utility and not morality. Small States are better off in a world ruled by law than in a lawless world. Small States benefit from a world order in which interactions between States are based upon international law and not power. It levels the playing field. It holds all States accountable by the same rules. This is also the reason why Singapore is a strong believer in referring disputes, which cannot be resolved by negotiations, to international modalities of dispute settlement, such as conciliation, mediation, arbitration and adjudication. Small States have a better chance of winning a dispute with a bigger State in a court of law than in a contest of strength.

Singapore's adherence to international law in its foreign policy has served Singapore well. This is true in our relations with our neighbours, such as Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines. This is also true in our relations with the major powers.

Conclusion

Let me conclude. Singapore is a small State. Our leaders like to say that in the ocean of life, the big fish eat small fish and the small fish eat shrimp. Singapore's first Prime Minister, Mr Lee Kuan Yew, once described Singapore as a poisonous shrimp. I prefer to see Singapore as a small fish. It is, however, an extraordinary small fish. It has organised the small fishes to band together for their mutual protection. It is a fast and agile swimmer and can out-swim many big fishes. The world is, however, a dangerous place and small fishes will always be vulnerable to the big predators of the ocean.

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Singaporean Expressions

Branding Singapore Through Singapore(an) English?

*By **Vincent B Y Ooi***

Branding Singapore Through Singapore(an) English?

Not long ago, Prime Minister (PM) Lee Hsien Loong urged new citizens to integrate into Singapore society by joining in the country's community life:

"Pick up Singapore customs, lifestyles, norms, (and) social rules. And if you can understand Singlish, so much the better." [1]

This is not only an excellent observation that the use of *Singlish* is very real in the local community but also that the discourse can be so localised that those new to the country would find it hard to understand.

I am reminded of an anecdote regarding a Caucasian male who approached a group of local students making Changi Airport as their study place during the examination period. When he listened to their *Singlish* for the first time, he asked them, "Excuse me, what language are you using?"

While we might find this a joking matter, PM Lee would probably not do so. When asked by a student from China regarding how *Singlish* as a unique language would help to bond Singaporeans, he said,

"I think many Singaporeans will not agree with me but I don't think we

should start a new language in Singapore called Singlish. There are too few of us…we have to have a sense of who we are, but it cannot be based on speaking Singlish. It has to be based on your pride in being a Singaporean, you grew up here...this is where you can make a difference and you fit in." [2]

According to PM Lee, [proper] English should be the working language here and *Singlish* should not be a part of the Singapore identity.

At the same time, we might also be reminded of Ambassador Tommy Koh's popular 1974 musing:

"When one is abroad in a bus or train or aeroplane and when one meets a fellow Singaporean, one can immediately identify that that person is Singaporean or Malaysian….and I should hope that when I speak English, no one will have a problem identifying that I'm Singaporean."

Of course, the type of English that Ambassador Tommy Koh advocates need not necessarily be construed as *Singlish* just because it is Singaporean in nature. In his own speech, Ambassor Koh is characterised as someone

[1] Channel NewsAsia (7 July 2012), retrieved from http://www.channelnewsasia.com/stories/singaporelocalnews/view/1212148/1/.html.
[2] AsiaOne (22 September 2012), retrieved from http://www.asiaone.com/News/AsiaOne%2BNews/Singapore/Story/A1Story20070922-26463.html.

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who speaks 'flawless English' with a Singaporean accent.[3]

What 'types' of English are used in Singapore? Is it always *Singlish* versus 'proper (standard) English'? What do we mean by the term *Singlish*? The discourse of English use in Singapore is usually characterised dichotomously, resulting in the 'Speak Good English Movement'[4] pitted against the 'Speak Good *Singlish* Movement'.[5]

In this article, I hope to offer a middle ground by sketching a model of English that relates the range of domestic English use to its international usage. The type of English for domestic use is often described by linguists as 'Singapore(an) English', one that goes beyond the somewhat derogatory and loaded term *Singlish*. It is Singapore(an) English that 'brands' Singapore and offers a common cultural discourse for the various ethnic groups/races that make up the country's composition.

Singapore(an) English as a 'variety' of English

It may be strange to non-linguists that the word 'English' can be pluralised nowadays, or that there are 'varieties of English'. Singapore(an) English (or 'SgE', Lim et al, 2010) may be characterised as a new variety of English such as Philippine English, Indian English and Malaysian English.

In Singapore, English is the language that links its main ethnicities which include 74 percent Chinese, 13 percent Malay and 9.2 percent Indians. According to the latest Census of Population 2010[6], English is the most frequently spoken language at home among 32.6 percent of the Chinese (while others use mostly Mandarin and Chinese dialects as home languages), 17.0 percent of the Malays (while most use the Malay language as the home language) and 41.6 percent Indians (while others mostly use Tamil, other Indian languages or Malay). Despite this, English is the predominant language of instruction in learning institutions and can be considered the *de facto* national language (which constitutionally, and so *de jure*, is Malay). English is the leading language of administration, education, public signage and everyday interaction. Many Singaporeans are bilingual or trilingual, and the linguistic repertoire of a local Chinese resident can include knowledge of English, Mandarin Chinese and one of the Chinese dialects (typically Hokkien).

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[3] Chua Mui Hoong, posted on http://groups.yahoo.com/group/bmalaysia/message/4008.

[4] Retrieved from http://www.facebook.com/MySGSM#!/speakgoodenglishmovement?fref=ts.

[5] *Speak Good Singlish Movement*, retrieved from http://www.facebook.com/MySGSM.

[6] *Census of Population 2010*, retrieved from http://www.singstat.gov.sg/pubn/popn/c2010sr1/cop2010sr1.pdf and http://www.singstat.gov.sg/news/news/press31082010.pdf.

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English Use in Singapore is a Range or Continuum

The range of English use in Singapore may be characterised as follows: standard English (which usually means standard British/US English), SgE-H (educated, 'standard' Singaporean English) and SgE-L (Colloquial Singapore English, also popularly known as *Singlish*). Standard English is the benchmark set in grammar books, dictionaries, classroom texts, official media and print materials. SgE-H may be considered the local H(igh)-variety used and comprises 'invisible norms' that have to be distinguished from those of native English speakers.

SgE-L, as the L(ow) variety, is used in more domestic situations and is the popular colloquial variety found in (among others) casual conversations, television humour programmes, online personal blogs, chat rooms and discussion forums. I would prefer the term SgE-L to *Singlish* which has become a loaded term that is either hated or loved among Singaporeans. Unlike 'broken English' (which has no rules), the word order in SgE-L tends to be rule-governed. For example, the well-known SgE-L expression *Why you so liddat?* ('liddat' = 'like that', meaning 'Why do you behave in this manner?')

is not recognisable by native SgE-L speakers if it was rephrased in one of the following ways:

Why you liddat so?

Why so you liddat?

While SgE-L expressions[7] may be said to derive mainly from Chinese or Malay, native SgE-L speakers would probably also tend to agree that the expression *everyone is good* (to mean 'Hello, everyone') is not so much *Singlish* (if at all) as it is *Chinglish*. This expression is literally translated from the Chinese expression 大家好 into English.[8]

Ooi's Concentric Circles Model

The three aspects of English just outlined may be diagrammatically represented and 'graded' in terms of a 'Concentric Circles Model' (Ooi, 2001) as follows:

Circle 1 represents the inner circle that comprises 'core or standard English' linguistic expressions that may or may not be traditionally Germanic/French/Latin in origin. Non-Anglo expressions that are codified and standardised in dictionaries nowadays include *kungfu*, *sari* and *lychee*. Circle 1 items are unmarked and deemed acceptable internationally.

[7] Retrieved from http://freepages.family.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~jacklee/Files/19950503-ST-PleaseUseSinglishSparingly.pdf.
[8] The difference is that this is an expression recognised by mainland Chinese speakers, rather than native *Singlish* speakers. Search 'everybody is good' in Baidu.com for a list of instances.

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Circle 2 (SgE-H) is the next outer circle containing linguistic expressions from

English acceptable in more formal local situations, but go beyond their conventional meaning in Western discourse. For instance, *killer litter* is a hybrid of two intriguing and yet unlikely juxtapositions in Western discourse, ie the seriousness of 'killers' and the social irresponsibility of throwing harmless garbage on the ground. In Singaporean discourse though, this productive neologism is needed in a densely populated society of high-storey buildings. For many expressions, the influence from a local language or dialect is obvious. An example is *sleep late.* In US English, a song title such as *I like to sleep late in the morning* makes it clear that one gets up late in the morning; in SgE-H, it would be much more common to refer to staying up late at night. Thus,

a sentence such as *I like to sleep late at 3am* would have its corresponding meaning in either Malay ('*tidur lewat*') or Chinese ('*wan shuì*'). Pakir (2009: 85) reminds us that 'Singapore offers an example of a (tropical) ^vcountry where spontaneous daily interaction among speakers of several languages over a long period of time has led to (various linguistic) innovation processes' and semantic shifts which differ from the conventional Western discourses that we tend to associate standard English with. Thus, "while Australians might find the description of 'windy' for homes as a negative feature in the (real estate) 'for sale' advertisements, Singaporeans consider 'windy' as 'breezy' and therefore a positive feature" (Pakir, 2009: 96). Another noteworthy point is that the sense of 'breeziness' would not tend to invite the charge of *Singlish* among Singaporeans.

Circle 3 (SgE-H) is the next outer circle containing linguistic expressions that are also acceptable in formal local situations and go beyond their conventional understanding in Western discourse. However, unlike those in Circle 2, the items in this circle contain loanwords and expressions from other local languages (principally Chinese and Malay). There are no English equivalents without missing local associations. Examples

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include *silat* ('Malay kungfu'), *songkok* ('Malay hat'), *laksa* ('a popular curry dish') and *ice kachang* ('a dessert of shaved ice with various flavours and toppings' that can include *kachang*, a Malay word for 'peanuts'). Conceivably, Malay words such as *durian* (whose first use is attested by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as early as 1588) and *rambutan* (coined in 1707) would be in this circle instead of Circle 1. However, these words have stood the test of time and are now accepted by the world's English-speaking community. Hence, the words *durian* and *rambutan* rightfully belong to Circle 1.

Circle 4 (SgE-L or *Singlish* expressions taken from English) is the next outer circle of English-derived expressions that are deemed suitable for local colloquial or informal situations only. In this circle, structures from colloquial Chinese or Malay are 'filled by' English words. Thus, the expression 'I follow Mother to the market' does not mean that the interlocutor walks behind but instead accompanies the mother. In casual conversations, blur is also used as an adjective, to mean 'confused or dazed'. Former Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew used this example of 'blur' as a prototypical *Singlish* feature. [9]

Circle 5 (SgE-L or Singlish expressions taken from other languages or dialects)

represents the outermost circle of least transparency (in relation to 'core English') in having terms of non-English origin that are primed for local colloquial situations only. *Makan* is the Malay word for 'to eat', *paktor* is the Cantonese Chinese word for 'dating', and *kiasu* is a word borrowed from Hokkien that means 'afraid to lose out'. Proponents of the 'Speak Good English Movement' in Singapore would probably be appalled to learn that the publishers of Oxford Dictionaries ("the world's most trusted dictionaries") have included both *kiasu* and the Malay word *lepak* ('loafing') – labelling them as 'South East Asian' usage. [10]

Both Circles 2 and 3 would be acceptable in more formal situations, for example classroom reports, newspaper editorials and broadcast news (see Ooi, 2007 and Low, 2010, for a range of other expressions in Circles 2 and 3). However, both Circles 4 and 5 would be acceptable in colloquial or highly informal situations only (usually speech) and contain terms that are popularly known as 'Singapore Colloquial English' or *Singlish*.

This way of thinking about English in Singapore, ranging from Circles 1 to 5, would remove a lot of the linguistic anxiety surrounding the use of a linguistic expression as either *Singlish* or 'standard

[9] *The Business Times* (16 Aug 1999), reproduced in http://groups.yahoo.com/group/beritamalaysia/message/12662.
[10] Retrieved from http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/kiasu?q=kiasu and http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/lepak?q=lepak.

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English'. We can use the model to relate domestic English to international English usage; at the same time, it would help foreigners to avoid cross-cultural miscommunication (as in the case of 'windy') when they first arrive in the country.

Singapore(an) English: Generational Changes, Technological Affordances

We should note that Singaporean English is not a static entity; it noticeably changes over time as younger and older Singaporeans prefer different expressions respectively. At the same time, the rise of Short Message Service (SMS), instant messaging, blogs, twitter and Facebook also means that Singaporean English is shaped by such technological affordances in an increasingly 24/7 online world.

For instance, the expression 'see me no up' (literally from Chinese 看不起我) was used no fewer than five times in the course of a conversation by a middle-aged Chinese lady in a popular local shopping mall recently. The Coxford Singlish Dictionary[11] lists it as follows:

> *SEE ME NO UP*
>
> *To be looked down upon by someone. Can also be used to accuse someone of being condescending. "You know me for so long and still treat me like that? You damn see me no up, is it?"*

I suspect that younger (Chinese) Singaporeans would not use this expression much, if at all, and would prefer the corresponding Mandarin Chinese form instead.

In terms of the newer phenomenon of computer-mediated communication (CMC), the following excerpt is taken from a personal blog by a 15-year old female teen:

> LoNG tiMe NO Blog lE..FinalLy..aFteR THe prEllms..Nw LeFt WiTh ScIencE pRActIcAl

Writing in a blend of SgE-L and Computer-mediated communicaton (CMC), this teen prefers a mix of upper and lower case in order to identify with a younger female group. CMC represents the newer literacy nowadays, in which expressions online are mediated by the keyboard that at once signifies a blend of both speech and writing.

Now, consider the following excerpt from a Twitter post:

> ABC
> @xyz how come sia omg its killing me.

The one who posts, 'ABC' (whose real name is anonymised here), is writing to another Twitter account holder, 'xyz' (anonymised for privacy too). ABC, a Malay speaker, uses the particle *sia* (presumably a shortening from the Malay swear word *sial*) to relate with

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[11] Retrieved from http://www.talkingcock.com/html/lexec.php?op=LexLink&lexicon=lexicon&keyword=SEE%20ME%20NO%20UP.

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his friend xyz. *Omg* ('Oh my God') is increasingly a well-known common computer-mediated abbreviation marker.

Conclusion

Beyond thinking about English use in Singapore as either 'standard English' or *Singlish*, the Concentric Circles Model shows the scaffolding that is needed for learners to move towards the acquisition of (international) standard English or for those new to Singapore to better understand the English used within the country. Through its unique blend of Western and Asian discourses and cultures, Singapore(an) English continues to showcase the country to the world.

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Singaporean Expressions

How to Look at Contemporary Art from Singapore?

*By **Tan Boon Hui***

How to Look at Contemporary Art from Singapore?

Legends of the Fall

One of the enduring myths among art lovers in Singapore has been that the so-called 'Nanyang' style was the distinctive high point and the origin of a distinguishable Singapore art. Never mind that in the 1950s, Singapore was still effectively a colony and part of the overall Malayan sphere. To this day, many collectors, art lovers and even senior artists and curators, look back at the paintings, drawings and sketches of Liu Kang, Cheong Soo Pieng, Lim Cheng Hoe and Georgette Chen with genuine affection and yes, wistfulness. This is in contrast to their sometimes explicit aversion to the contemporary art that is being created by the present generation of artists. A common refrain from this camp is that contemporary Singapore art is not rooted in our culture and that there is nothing that the eye can discern that is derived or inspired by the unique environment that we live in. By this, they are usually referring to idiosyncratic juxtaposition of western painting techniques and mediums with local subject matter that dominated many of the works of the first generation of artists. The archetypical image is that of Cheong Soo Pieng's numerous doe-eyed maidens with their elongated, slender limbs, rifting imageries from the traditional *wayang* or shadow puppet figures. Languid and suffused with warm, tender tones of ochre, green and red, the works are inviting to the eye and do speak of the artists' clear pride in the lands and cultures of this region. It is thus no wonder that to those more familiar with these images, the contemporary art being created today, especially when it seems dominated not by painting with recognisable subject matter but strange installations, videos and worse, performances seem like the proverbial fall from the dizzying heights of greatness. What then are the features of art-making today and how do we to appreciate them? Yet, to compare the art of the pioneer artists' times with the contemporary art of today seems like comparing apples to oranges. Art today can no longer return to the visions and styles of the 'Nanyang' artists because of two changes.

Responses to Transformations in Singapore Society

First, Singapore society has changed irrevocably from the 1950s. We are now an urbanised society and independent nation rather than a British colony. While the previous generations of artists attempted to define our distinctive cultural identity *vis-a-vis* western culture giving rise to all the familiar descriptions of 'east versus west', artists working today tend to take the reality of the Singapore nation as an important frame of reference. They are less concerned with what we are **not** (that is western) but more with asking **who** we are. The work *Inside Outside* by young Singaporean artist Charles Lim is instructive in this respect. Recently

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shown at the Singapore Art Museum's *The Singapore Show: Future Proof*, the installation comprises a wall of photographs of floating sea markers that denote the limits of Singapore's territorial boundaries. The artist photographed each marker from both sides of the invisible line separating Singapore from other territories, which depicts in essence travelling in and out of the nation. A live ship radio is installed alongside the photographs enabling a real time connection to marine vessels requesting permission to enter Singapore waters. This auditory act, repeated by each incoming vessel both expresses and reinforces the invisible boundaries that contain the Singapore nation. The installation *Inside Outside* crystallises the slipperiness of the boundaries that define us. As an island nation, our national space is out at sea, invisible to the eye. While the markers are stationary, the waters move freely beneath them alluding to the fluidity of the Singapore identity.

The mobility of many of our young artists in the contemporary period, many of whom have trained overseas and worked in many lands, has ironically driven them to focus even more on using their art as a way of affirming the reality of who we are as a people and a culture. While the earlier generations came to make this place their home, the current generation of artists has to consider why Singapore is still home even if they are a thousand miles away. The artist Dawn Ng had to move to Paris a few years ago. Her subsequent loneliness and separation from her native homeland, Singapore, inspired her work *Thirty-one Kinds of Wonderful* where she decided to handcraft a piece of artwork every day for a month using materials from the

Charles Lim, Inside Outside, 2005, Photographs & ship radio connection, artist collection, installation view at The Singapore Show: Future Proof, Singapore Art Museum.

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Parisian markets. Humourous yet moving, the objects in this series are a testament to the invisible ties that bind the artist to her homeland across the oceans.

Indeed, the sense of loss against the assaults of time and history is a perennial theme in much contemporary art created here since 2000. The threats to identity, values and destructions of the urban fabric appear persistently in the works. Since the advent of contemporary art

materials available for the creation of art have expanded far beyond the limits of earlier pioneers. Alongside easel painting and sculptures, the exposure to other means of art-making since the 1980s has enlarged the repertoire for artists to encompass installation, performance art, video and photography. Part of this expansion of possibilities is related to the acceptance by contemporary artists of the primacy of concept in contemporary art. By this, we mean that more and more artists believe that the ideas behind

Dawn Ng, Thirty-one Kinds of Wonderful, 2011, Various media, private & artist collections, view of 'anger management plate'. Image courtesy of artist.

practice in the 1980s, the bulk of art created here has been inspired by issues of society, culture and values. Art for art's sake has never really taken hold here despite the infusion of new artistic ideas from the West.

Impact of Expanded Means for Art-making

The second marked difference in Singapore art now is that the means and

an artwork are just as important, and may even be more important than the form of the work.

This acceptance has important consequences for art-making today. One of the most immediate is that art need no longer just be confined to the forms of fine art as we conventionally imagine them. Instead, whatever materials could serve the intentions of the artists could now be used. This is the basis of many installation art today. In her work *Crystal City*, the artist Donna Ong arranges a large quantity of glass bottles and containers consciously to evoke an image of an urban skyline, with soaring skyscrapers and modern buildings. The sparkling glass suggests the newness and modernity of the city, yet the fragility of the materials also hints at the brittle foundations and hopes upon which the heroic edifices of the modern city are built. The imaginative richness of this work also stems from the artist's

manipulation of form and material in the service of artistic concept. The idea and intention of the work now determines ever more directly the choice of medium and material.

This new development in the nature of art is even more clearly demonstrated in a seminal work *Dear Cai Xiong (A Letter From Ho Ho Ying, 1972),* from one of the pioneers of contemporary art practice, Cheo Chai Hiang, which is based on an actual incident in Singapore's art history. In 1972, Cheo Chai Hiang, a member of the Modern Art Society made a proposal for the society's exhibition entitled 'Singapore River'. Instead of the expected painting, for instance, he sent a set of written instructions to the exhibition organisers, instructing them to draw a square measuring five feet, stretching from the gallery floor to the adjacent wall. His proposal was clearly focused on the concepts of art rather than its formal visual properties. It was rejected by the

Donna Ong, Crystal City, 2009, Glassware, various dimensions, Singapore Art Museum collection, installation view at President's Young Talents exhibition, Singapore Art Museum.

How to Look at Contemporary Art from Singapore?

Cheo Chai Hiang, *Dear Cai Xiong (A Letter From Ho Ho Ying, 1972)*, 2005, Pencil on unprimed canvas, set of 4, 379 x 257 cm (each), Singapore Art Museum collection.

Society and Society founder, Mr Ho Ho Ying, who responded to Cheo in a letter which presented the view that Art, besides being new, also had to resonate with its viewers and possess unique qualities. It reflected the debates that had started over art's purposes and the best methods and forms with which artists should employ to serve the former.

In *Dear Cai Xiong (A Letter From Ho Ho Ying, 1972)*, originally written by Mr Ho Ho Ying in Mandarin, was reproduced by Cheo as an installation much later in 2005. Here, in this one work, was the encapsulation of all the debates over the nature of art, one in which contemporary art, informed by conceptualist ideas, eventually found its space.

The primacy of concept over mere form as a feature of contemporary art practice in Singapore today did not merely edge out the old pictorial representations. Rather, it should be seen as enlarging the creative possibilities of art. This is clear when we look at what some young artists

have been doing with the paint medium in recent years.

Paintings by Singapore painter, Jane Lee, are about painting and paint itself as an expressive medium. Instead of the representative images of painting, she treats paint as a sculptural medium and her paintings are literally objects of weight, texture and three-dimensional form. Trained also in textiles, the artist weaves her paint as if they are threads in a loom, building up complex layers and textures that forcefully encourage the viewer to see her paintings as an object in them rather than a container for other imageries. In the monumental and visually stunning *Status*, the red paint literally frees itself from the picture frame to become an independent element, a curling carpet on the gallery floor. The intense red and sensuous threads of paint, painstakingly applied layer upon layer, create a compelling presence in the gallery. In *Status*, one sees how the freedom that privileges the concepts of art over its need to stay within fixed

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formal frameworks has brought new creative possibilities to even old mediums.

The viewer is thus encouraged to embrace these new trajectories that the younger artists have followed. These trajectories represent the cutting edge of artistic development as it absorbs the full impact of globalisation and the social transformations that Singapore society is undergoing over time. To reject contemporary art because it is unfamiliar is to shut ourselves out of the future and its possibilities.

Jane Lee, *Status,* 2009*,* Mixed media*,* 480 x 420 x 120 cm*,* image courtesy of artist. Acquired with the support of Binjai Tree Foundation in honour of Chia Yew Kay, Singapore Art Museum collection.

About the Author
Tan Boon Hui has been Director of the Singapore Art Museum (SAM) since August 2009. His current portfolio involves transforming SAM into a leading centre for contemporary Southeast Asian and Asian art. He leads the curatorial team building one of the most important public collections of contemporary Southeast Asian art in the world, developing international exchanges and the creation of new commissioning platforms. As Director, he also heads the organising secretariat for the Singapore Biennale 2013.

Singaporean Expressions

Singapore Food, Seriously On My Mind

*By **Margaret Chan***

Singapore Food, Seriously On My Mind

On the first night in Sydney, there were just two of us and we went to eat Thai because it was the only Asian restaurant on the street. "Ahhhh," said my Japanese friend, "Singapore noodles, my favourite." She clapped her hands in an adorable *kawaii* way and as her enthusiasm was such, I did not want to tell her that Singapore noodles in Australia and Britain is **not** Singapore noodles. I chose *laksa* (yes, in a Thai restaurant). It came with thin *beehoon*, not the 'correct' thick vermicelli. "Oh well," I thought.

On the second night, some 20 of us went to eat at Temasek Restaurant. I had *laksa* — again — a choice that derived (I would like to think), from a deep instinct rather than a limited imagination. Again it was made with thin *beehoon*, but at least the gravy was 'authentic'. The *rendang* was 'real', so too the *chendol*. On the third night, I hopefully suggested Temasek again, but our party had a Japanese majority, who voted with their feet — dinner was at a Japanese restaurant. What makes a Singaporean eat *laksa* two meals in a row, when a Russian would not?

For one thing, we have *langkwas, serai, kunyit, belacan, haybee* - they have

beetroot. This suggests a connection with geography and perhaps dietary ecology. Maybe Singaporeans have a *laksa* gene. D'Adamo theorised that our earliest ancestors, Cro-Magnons, were 'O' blood-type meat-eaters. They were such successful hunters; Cro-Magnons killed off all the game herds and so, starved to death. The Neolithics, who followed, made a start with agriculture evolving into 'A' blood types better disposed to digesting grain.[1] People had become omnivorous in order to survive.

The omnivore, however, faced a dilemma: A wider diet meant experimenting with a wider variety of foods and this translated into greater exposure to eating something unsafe. And so people invented cooking and cuisine.[2] Cuisines often ritualise food safety for example, the proscription against pork in Middle-Eastern cuisines stemmed from a concern with the pig's filthy feeding habits.[3] In this way, eating developed into a culture. "All animals feed but humans alone eat," noted Farb and Armalegos.[4] People became familiar with the specific foods of their community which became their "habitus", that Bourdieuan concept of "systems of durable, transposable

[1] D'Adamo, Peter J (1996), *Eat Right 4 Your Type*, New York: GP Putnam's Sons.
[2] Rozin, Elizabeth (1982), The Structure of Cuisine, in Lewis M Barker (ed), *The Psychobiology of Human Food Selection*, Westport, CT: AVI, pp 189-203.
[3] Harris, Marvin (2008), The Abominable Pig, in Carole Counihan and Penny van Esterik (eds), *Food and Culture: A Reader*, Second Edition, New York: Routledge, (1997), pp 54-66.
[4] Farb, Peter & Armalegos, George J (1980), *Consuming Passions: The Anthropology of Eating*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, p 3.

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dispositions".[5] This is why it is not only I, but also Lim Swee Say, Minister in the Prime Minister's Office, who must have *laksa*. This food was what he missed most as a student in the United Kingdom in the 1970s.[6] What then might be Singapore food? A *Straits Times* report on a hawker food promotion at Fullerton Hotel provided some answers.[7]

For 62-year-old Lim Soon Hock, Singapore food is about the memories of childhood meals with his father at food stalls along Singapore River: "the stench of the Singapore River, the high humidity on hot afternoons, the congestion and jostling through large office crowds." Sixty-five year-old Chan Heng Wing was adamant about traditional recipes. "*Char kway teow* has to be fried with lard," he said, "God forbid the day when people fry their *char kway teow* in olive oil."

However, Singapore's former number one Mandarin, Ngiam Tong Dow, who was at the Hawker Fest with Lim and Chan was unsentimental. Singapore, advised Ngiam, should industrialise and modernise its local food. This suggests that items such as Ya Kun Kaya Toast, Hock Lam Beef Noodles, Nam Seng Noodles, Kim Choo Kueh Chang, Annie's Peanut Ice Kachang, Pagi Sore, Hoo Kee Rice Dumpling and Teck Kee Tanglin Pau (which were on the Fullerton Hotel spread), might be analysed and quantified into formulae that would reproduce exact tastes and textures *en masse*, over and over again. The idea of mechanisation might seem to be the very antithesis of a food of a people, but that is what we are all eating today, and we are becoming fat, very fat, for it. Industrialisation is the latest development in the human dietary evolution. It has produced a super abundance of inexpensive, high-density foods which we often eat sitting in front of the TV or computer.[8] The consequence is nightmarish: Worldwide, obesity has more than doubled since 1980. In 2008, more than 1.4 billion adults were overweight of whom, 200 million men and 300 million women were obese.[9]

Mr Ang Hak Seng, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Health Promotion Board (HPB) tells of obesity in Singapore jumping from seven percent in 2004 to 11 percent in 2010, and although there are not as many fat Singaporeans as there are fat Americans (35 percent), British (26 percent) and Australians (25 percent),

[5] Bourdieu, Pierre (1990), *The Logic of Practice*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, p 53.
[6] Lim in Kong, Lily (2007), *Singapore Hawker Centres: People, Places, Food*, Singapore: National Environment Agency, p 106.
[7] Toh, Wen Li (18 May 2012), Famous Hawkers' Buffet at Riverside, *The Straits Times*, *Life!*: D17.
[8] Armelagos, George J (Summer 2010), The Omnivore's Dilemma: The Evolution of the Brain and the Determinants of Food Choice, *Journal of Anthropological Research*, 66 (2), pp 161-186.
[9] World Health Organization (May 2012), *Obesity and overweight*, Fact sheet No 311, retrieved from http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs311/en/ accessed 12 October 2012.

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Ang says we are close to the tipping point. Ang has taken the fight to the hawker centres since almost 70 percent of Singaporeans eat at least one meal at a hawker centre daily.[10] The *Healthier Hawker Programme*, launched in July 2006, is aimed at coaxing hawkers to cook with healthier ingredients for instance, using vegetable oil instead of lard. I went, in September 2012, to check out a hawker centre where the 'Healthier Choice' symbol (a red triangle on a white badge) was pasted on many stalls. In the busy lunch period that I spent there, I did not see anyone ask for high-fibre noodles or unpolished rice. My impression was that both customers and hawkers were too harassed to even think of new choices. HPB's CEO Ang knows the problem and he has made arrangements at some food places for the reverse to happen. Unless you specify 'unhealthy', you automatically get your food with less oil, less sugar and less salt.[11] Ang hopes that in time, our tastebuds will be re-educated.[12] This intervention is timely, for with the rise in dual-career families, fewer meals are being eaten at home. In Singapore in 2011, the married labour force participation rate was 85 percent for men and 60 percent for women.[13] A 2005 survey of 100 Singaporean and 100 Malaysian youngsters reported that while 32.9 percent of Malaysian youths had their lunch prepared at home, only 7.2 percent of young Singaporeans ate a home-cooked lunch.[14] Professor May Wong, speaking at a seminar on food choices being made in Singapore homes, cited a survey of 130 Singapore women in which respondents said they were just too busy to cook. Weekends were a frenzy of ferrying children from one activity to another, for enrichment education is high priority with Singapore parents. Respondents also pointed out that it was cheaper to buy pre-prepared food than to cook at home.[15] Professor Wong further

[10] Long, Susan (5 October 2012), Promoting Health, One Hawker Meal at a Time, *The Straits Times*, Friday, *Opinion*: A33.

[11] Ibid. This healthy food scheme is in place in hawker centres in Yuhua, Eunos Crescent, Haig Road, Geylang Serai and Marine Terrace, and in six coffeeshops in Woodlands, Bedok, Bukit Batok and Jurong East. The scheme will be extended to 25 food places by end 2012.

[12] For more on the Singapore fight against obesity, see Goh, Lee Gan & Pang, Jonathan (January - March 2012), Obesity in Singapore, Prevention and Control, *The Singapore Family Physician*, 3 (1): pp 8-13.

[13] Ministry of Social and Family Development, MSF, 'Women and the Economy: Labour Force Participation Rate (Married Females)', http://app.msf.gov.sg/ResearchRoom/ResearchStatistics/LabourForceParticipationRateMarriedFemales.aspx accessed 2 November 2012.

[14] Lew, K & Barlow, PJ (2005), Dietary Practices of Adolescents in Singapore and Malaysia, *Singapore Medical Journal*, 46 (6): 282-88, p 282.

[15] Wong, May (18 September 2012), Food Provision and Food Choice Decision-Making: The Changing Role of Women in Singapore, *Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore Seminar Series*. Wang is Associate Professor of Community Health Sciences at the UCLA Fielding School of Public Health, Los Angeles and an ARI affiliate.

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revealed that unlike in the west, where children ate what was put in front of them, in Singapore homes the food choices were often made by children. This last bit of information is not surprising for we know how Singaporean parents mix the Chinese penchant for growing little emperors with notions of western liberalism in a sure recipe for rule by child. I am sure we need only ask around to hear Singapore stories similar to those told by Yan, an anthropologist who researched the fast-food scene in China. One report was of a Beijing family who regularly went to McDonald's because the daughter loved the food. It was irrelevant that mother did not like, and father absolutely abhorred hamburgers.[16]

James Watson believes that American fast food succeeded in China because the industry had entered into a society that was witnessing the collapse of an outdated Confucian family system. Until the 1980s, he noted, few Chinese children ate meals outside their homes and now youngsters aged three and four can walk up to a counter, slap down money and order their own food. For the first time in history, writes Watson, children are "full-scale consumers

who command respect in today's economy".[17] And it is western fast food that our economically empowered youth want. Yan tells how a "war of fried chickens" erupted in Beijing in 1989 to 1990 with the likes of Lingzhi Roast Chicken and Ronghua Fried Chicken rising up to take on KFC. The Chinese eateries failed miserably. So, Chinese fast-food restaurants began to offer local fare. In 1992, the Jinghe Kuaican Company, representing nearly a thousand state-owned restaurants, offered five sets of value meals and more than 50 fast-food items cooked to traditional recipes; but the business folded as quickly as it opened.[18] Lew and Barlow reported that more than 89 percent of the Singaporean youths they surveyed ate at western fast-food restaurants. More than 66 percent went once a week, but some ate western fast food eight times, or even more in a week.[19]

In order to understand why the Americans succeeded when the Chinese failed, we need to think of 'cuisine' beyond the narrower posh sense of the word to Belasco's wider definition of the concept, which includes food selectivity (preferred cooking styles, food flavours and food

[16] Yan, Yunxiang (2008), Of Hamburgers and Social Space: Consuming McDonald's in Beijing, in Counihan Carole and Van Esterik, Penny (eds), *Food and Culture: A Reader*, Second Edition, New York: Routledge, (1997), pp 500-522: 512.
[17] Watson, James L, China's Big Mac Attack, in James L Watson and Melissa L Caldwell (eds), *The Cultural Politics of Food and Eating: A Reader*, Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005, p 74.
[18] Yan, *Of Hamburgers and Social Space*, pp 503-504.
[19] Lew and Barlow, *Dietary Practices of Adolescents*, p 284.

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aesthetics) with food eating rituals, as well as the organised systems of producing and distributing the food.[20] McDonald's must be studied as an industry that retails culture. A Chinese mother told Yan how she had made a great effort to adapt to the taste of burgers so she could take her daughter to eat at McDonald's twice a week. The mother wanted her daughter to learn about American culture and be able to type in English for she planned to buy her child a computer. Yan writes of the McDonald's experience as a multi-dimensional social space. Eating at McDonald's connected the Chinese diners with the rest of the world. Dining on foreign foods allowed them to think of themselves as young professionals. And because McDonald's does not sell alcohol, women feel comfortable eating at McDonald's alone. At Chinese restaurants, the single woman diner is surveyed as a prostitute.[21]

What McDonald's had done was create a habitus. Another example of a food habitus is the Japanese station box lunch (ekibento, ekiben for short), a tradition that originated from the portable rice ball and pickles which were already written about in the Japanese 11th century literary classic, *The Tale of Genji*. Noguchi writes about travelling through Japan eating regional and seasonal specialties sold at train stations, for instance, fugu (blowfish), which is sold only at Shimonoseki Station between November and March. And of course there is the institution of the obento children lunch boxes symbolising "an ideology which encodes motherhood, education, and the state."[22]

If Singapore would start a food revolution, what are the stories we might tell? For one, we can celebrate our squeaky-clean reputation. Ten new hawker centres are coming up in the next five years. Dr Vivian Balakrishnan, Minister for the Environment and Water Resources told *The Sunday Times* that these new eating places would preferably be run on a not-for-profit basis and would probably be located near community facilities to continue the evolution of the hawker centre as a uniquely Singaporean communal space.[23] Can we expect a revolutionary new concept to eating out in Singapore? Think how the open kitchen has become a standard design at swanky restaurants. It started off as a window on celebrity chefs at work but now, it is because people want to be connected to the cooking they are eating and they want to know that the food is

[20] Belasco, Warren (2005), Food and the Counterculture: A Story of Bread and Politics, in James L Watson and Melissa L Caldwell (eds), *The Cultural Politics of Food and Eating: A Reader*, Malden, MA: Blackwell, pp 217-234: 219-220.
[21] Yan, *Of Hamburgers and Social Space*, pp 507-13.
[22] Noguchi, Paul H (Autumn 1994), Savor Slowly: Ekiben: The Fast Food of High-Speed Japan, *Ethnology*, 33 (4), 1994: pp 317-330: 318.
[23] Zaccheus, Melody (21 October 2012), 3 Towns to Get New Hawker Centres, *The Sunday Times*, Home, p 15.

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being prepared in sterile, stainless steel environments. Have we thought of parading dishwashing systems?

I think we need an industry that produces and delivers wholesome meals; perhaps to childcare centres, to be picked up by parents who come to fetch their children home, or to be delivered to the door in a postal-type service. Let me tell you my story. I have been married 39 years, and for all of this time, every day I worried about what to cook. A few months ago, my maid was suddenly called home. My daughter, without consulting me, engaged a 'tingkat' caterer to deliver dinner. I was appalled. I had never, ever thought of pre-prepared meals for the family. But when I gave into the scheme, I experienced a liberation that I had never known before. "So this is what it means to be a husband," no more worrying about what to cook, no more onerous marketing errands. This is why I can

testify that easy access to wholesome meals is crucial if the dual-income household is to eat healthily. And if institutional cooking sounds most unappetising, remember that one important reason for McDonald's success is its standardised food. A Big Mac in China is likely to taste rather like a Big Mac in Iceland or Singapore. So perhaps we should forget about making tasty *laksa* with low-fat milk, and think instead of unheard-of recipes and never-before-seen restaurant service, developed perhaps in annual competitions where youngsters sit as judges. As Gary Hamel bluntly puts it, "the conversation about 'where we go next' should be dominated by individuals who have their emotional equity invested in the future rather than the past."[24] This, I think, would be Singapore food for me - nothing short of a culinary reformation.

Glossary:

beehoon	: (H) thin, dried, rice-flour noodles
belacan	: (M) fermented shrimp paste (like anchovies)
char kway teow	: (H) literally stir-fried rice-flour ribbons
chendol	: (M) green-coloured mung bean-flour vermicelli (rather like spätzle), with candied red (azuki) beans in coconut milk sweetened with palm sugar
hay bee	: (H) dried shrimp
kawaii	: (J) cute
kunyit	: (M) tumeric

[24] Hamel, Gary (2012), What Matters Now: How to Win in a World of Relentless Change, Ferocious Competition, and Unstoppable Innovation, San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass. (This quote comes from a blurb on Hamel's book, *Leadership Now, 'Leading Blog'*, http://www.leadershipnow.com/leadingblog/2012/05/what_matters_now.html accessed 13 October 2012.

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laksa	:	(H) thick, freshly-made, rice-flour noodles in spicy-coconut gravy. I propose that this word is not Malay, but derives from the Hokkien *luak sha* ('spicy sand,' because the thick gravy resembles an old Hokkien dish that used ground peanut which looked 'sandy'. Only Chinese, not Malays cook this dish.
langkwas	:	(M) galangal
rendang	:	(M) beef slow-stewed in a dark, coconutty curry.
serai	:	(M) lemongrass
tingkat	:	(M) tiffin-carrier

H=Hokkien; J=Japanese; M=Malay

About the Author

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A Song for Singapore - Aches & Dreams

By *Kirpal Singh*

i

I dream of a Singapore that gives me the freedom I yearn for
But the ache is the need to be circumspect, careful, sensitive

I dream of a Singapore which will enjoy poetry readings
But the ache is that seats remain empty even when there's no charge!

I dream of a Singapore which the world celebrates for its verve
But the ache is many of us don't even know the word!

I dream of a Singapore where our schools, colleges, universities will educate
But the ache is that for now we mostly only graduate urchins making money

I dream of a Singapore that will allow the homeless to be secure
But the ache is the coldness of cement is where these sleep

I dream of a Singapore where the opposition in politics will be always welcomed
But the ache is it is a cruel world out there and the opposition is lonely

I dream of a Singapore where my children will hear and sing with joy
But the ache is my children find unsmiling faces and most out of key

I dream of a Singapore where the nites are delectably full of dreams
But the ache is that for most the nites are sleepy with nightmares

I dream and I dream and I dream of my wonderful and glorious Singapore
But the ache is no one else wants to dream these dreams with me.

ii

My ache is that so many don't know my beautiful lion city
But the dream is that one day they will

My ache is that Singapore gets maligned again and again
But the dream is that soon those maligning will know better

My ache is that Singapore is still seen as a cultural desert
But the dream is that culture will flow in the veins of all

My ache is that Singapore remains insecure, afraid to be bold
But the dream is that soon we will know the difference

My ache is that my people don't want to know me well
But the dream is that many are starting to be curious

My ache is that so much humanity is wasted as we make loads of money
But the dream is that humanity will triumph and money will be just money

My ache is that no one comes to Singapore to gain intellectual capital
But the dream is that my students will challenge this and retort

My ache is Singapore is trying too hard, too hard to be global
But the dream is that we will become the hub of hubs, the global city

My ache is, my ache is deep and I cannot fathom how to sing
But the dream is that music is going to flow, embracing all.

iii

These dreams and these aches find an outlet
In staccato and in verse symbolizing poetry
The leaves remain green while turning brown
As the clouds explode with thunder and rain

These aches and dream bring out memories
Charting courses, redrawing history, remembering
We move and mark our journeys with significance
While the sun and the moon and the stars shine.

Dream and aches. Aches and dreams-
Our life, our living, our existence, our Singapore
Framed and reframed, planned and unplanned
Beckons the writing of a real song, a real poem.

About the Author
Kirpal Singh is an internationally-acclaimed poet, scholar, critic and creativity guru and currently the Director of the Wee Kim Wee Centre at the Singapore Management University where he oversees the new Arts & Culture Management Programme.

Singaporean Cultural Mandate

Maze and Minefield: Reflections on Multiculturalism in Singapore

*By **Lai Ah Eng***

Maze and Minefield: Reflections on Multiculturalism in Singapore

Anthropological Reflections

To work on multiculturalism in Singapore is to wander in a wonderous maze of its diversities and their limitless combinations and exchanges. However, it is also to walk into a minefield of complexity, challenge and conflict in which one can easily get confused and lost, encounter misunderstanding and misjudgement, and experience uncertainty and anxiety. As a resident anthropologist, I find the terrain of Singapore's multiculturalism at once both maze and minefield, selective aspects on which I reflect here.

Race, Ethnicity, Culture

Many today would object to the use of the term 'race'. Inherited from an era when biological race and white supremacist ideology underpinned British colonial rule, it continues to be used uncritically and indiscriminately, in official and social life. When Singaporeans refer to 'race' or allege 'racism', they usually mean ethnicity/ethnic group and ethnocentrism with ignorance and prejudice based on social rather than biological attributes. The term 'ethnicity' better replaces 'race', although 'racism' is more firmly established in usage than 'ethnocentrism'. Similarly, I prefer the terms 'multiethnic' and 'multicultural' over 'racial' and 'multiracial'.

The notion of 'ethnic group' and its characteristics of ancestry, culture, language, religion, history and identity are central to multiculturalism. It is their combinations in intergroup ethnic relations, often intersecting with class, that play out in multivariate ways which give it substance and meaning. 'Ethnic group' itself can be problematic, such as the assumptions of homogeneity and cultural fixity and superimposed membership. In the Singapore context, historical and social circumstances have brought diverse peoples together and colonial and postcolonial projects and agendas set the stage for their interaction with strong Chinese, Malay, Indian, Eurasian and other ethnic markers and identities.

The Maze and Minefield of Multiculturalism

Cultural diversity

Singapore's cultural diversity immediately brings to mind foods, costumes, dances, religious sites, events and various manifestations of cultural identities that are also often hybridised or localised versions of some original sources. Tourism and state representations may appropriate or rework some of these that raise issues of authenticity while critics view them as superficial, essentialised, stereotyped and detracting from real issues. However, my anthropological observations remind against underestimating how

Maze and Minefield: Reflections on Multiculturalism in Singapore

much Singaporeans embrace them meaningfully as part of their lives. Indeed, a multicultural journey of events will fill virtually every week of every month in an entire year. Thimithi firewalking ceremony, Hari Raya Puasa, Tamil church service, Nine-Emperor-Gods processions – these are the living and symbolic expressions, identities and heritages of various ethnic, cultural and religious communities that involve participants as kin, friends, neighbours, co-residents, co-religionists and co-ethnics. Through them, the sense and essence of belonging and community are regularly experienced and revivified. These celebratory and heritage aspects of Singapore's multiculturalism speak of a diversity that is taken for granted but which did not come about overnight – it is one that has developed over time and generations and is still evolving. How they came to coexist, whether merely tolerated or appreciated, generalised or localised, 'original' or hybridised – this is the wondrous maze and grand narrative of Singapore's multiculturalism, to be appreciated in their historical and social significance.

However, the maze is also a minefield. Diversity immediately throws up multiple contexts, relationships and problems, with their consequent politics that raise questions about its durability and ability to make people cohere as a society and community. Cultural politics, such as that of heritage, space or memory, may lurk beneath celebrations and

erupt unexpectedly. Even peaceful and enjoyable processes of food hybridisation may have politics simmering 'in the pot', such as when origins and shared heritages are contested. Is *sambal belacan* Peranakan or Malay? Backed by the promotional powers of museums, tourism and donorship, Chinese Peranakan culture with its cuisines, costumes, patois and *pantuns* now passes off as a distinct culture. This may please Peranakans and fascinate tourists but the understated recognition of Malay and Southeast Asian roots, hybridisation and shared heritages upset others because it marginalises their contributions. And why is Thaipusam regulated for 'noise'? Why is a Singapore Soka contingent allowed in the National Day Parade but not other religious groups? Why is the ban on public processions celebrating Prophet Muhammad's birthday still enforced when conditions have changed drastically from 1964? Many questions and issues can be raised in the new politics of heritage and culture in Singapore's multiculturalism.

Sharing common spaces

Nowhere is the maze and minefield of multiculturalism most navigated by Singaporeans than where the vast majority live – in the Housing and Development Board (HDB) public housing heartland. Here, a cultural and symbolic map can be drawn of the local community's ethnic-cultural diversity

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through everyday exchanges and especially during special events, be this the Malay wedding, end of Ramadan prayers, Seventh Moon Festival or Chinese funerals. In this multiethnic context, ethnic special occasions, because of their powerful emotional and symbolic contents, also act as markers in relation to others. Their highly-public nature in common spaces immediately necessitates the negotiation of their diversities and boundaries, as these examples of Malay weddings and Chinese funerals show:

There is at least one most weekends, and it is usually on Sundays so we hardly have any rest. They are very noisy. Like last week, they even had dancing at night, and the night before already the music started. For such a special occasion, they should hold it in the community hall or hotel, why in the void deck? What kind of wedding is it anyway, with people looking and walking past? (James)

I notice that they really make it nice with atmosphere. Everybody comes to help do the preparation, cooking; people come in and out, play the drums. And the costumes that the bride and groom wear are really traditional and grand. I really like their wedding, it is full of tradition, not like us Chinese. (Julie)

I have heard other people say it is so noisy but I don't hear it. I don't mind. Live in

this type of place, must get used to it. The wedding lasts only for two days, our Chinese funeral also lasts for about two days, about the same. What for get angry? What for complain? (Ah Sin)

At first astonished, felt angry. So much noise, cannot sleep. Next day got to work isn't it? Also, so much ash. But after a while, accept it. Just shut window and go to sleep. Must accept lah, Chinese got their own way. Living together, give and take. In Singapore, must accept each other's way. (Ali)

I am not worried by other people's religions.. We just have to respect it no matter how stupid or silly you think it is. Every person has his own way of praying. Actually, in the end, everybody prays to the same God, just different way of praying. (Rita)

In their negotiations, residents' approaches range from ethnocentrism and ignorance to tolerance, acceptance and appreciation. However, the potential for ethno-religious tension exists.

The allocation of void deck space for Malay weddings and Chinese funerals was a major source of tension and test of HDB's impartiality in the early years of resettlement and shared living. This was because wedding preparations, including void deck bookings, could be made in advance, but wake preparations which take place only upon a resident's unpredictable death may be immediately

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made in the void deck without first obtaining a permit. It had thus occurred several times when a Malay wedding and a Chinese funeral both took place at the same void deck on the same weekend!

In the past, both sides just ignored each other; even though in same void deck, use different ends of it. HDB's part here depends. It can directly intervene or not intervene. If intervene, then may ask the Chinese to stay, the Malay to move to another location even though they booked in advance. Explain to the Malays that according to Chinese custom, once coffin is put there, cannot move it. But if don't intervene, then we tell the Chinese to go and speak to the Malay themselves. HDB will give them permit if they can convince the Malays of the need to change place (HDB estate officer).

Both approaches were used but obviously still risked antagonising and discriminating against Malay residents. HDB thus decided that the first-come-first-serve principle be strictly adhered to no matter how strongly one party might feel about the inviolability or significance of its event.

These examples from my research 25 years ago are as valid today. Special occasions remain part of the community's public and cultural life and most residents have come to accept and respect them as aspects of their multicultural environment. However tensions are likely to recur every now and then. Every new housing estate, new generation and new resident, including the new immigrant, needs to be socialised into navigating diversity with civility, competency and sensitivity. Here, the approaches in navigating boundaries and managing disputes that have evolved over time to become norms – expectations of residents' civil behaviour, HDB rules, use of mediators' negotiation skills and personal intercultural knowledge – are crucial.

Racism, structural inequalities

I have always looked for signs of equality in Singapore's multiculturalism. I did find some, but have also often encountered evidences and responses such as "What multiculturalism? The Chinese are the majority everywhere", "There is ethnic discrimination and racism" and "Singapore is becoming Chinapore".

The government's ethnic-based Chinese-Malay-Indian-Others (CMIO) approach has been blamed for racism's prevalence and divisiveness. Deeply entrenched into government systems, it has permeated every major field and level, affecting mindsets, policy-planning, resource allocation, political representation, population profiling, public housing, educational performance and the like. Thus for example, educational performance by ethnicity is highlighted regularly and the ethnic quota policy for public housing to prevent ethnic enclave formation is implemented

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even for rental housing. This ethnicised mindset, irrespective of context and relevance and to the exclusion of other criteria particularly class and other structural inequalities, has major consequences on the conceptualisation, analysis and solution of problems. The focus on ethnic groups has the effect of tending towards strong cultural explanations, easily relying on cultural stereotypes and reinforcing them. The common stereotypes of the hardworking Chinese and lazy Malays, for example, are supposed to represent ethnic cultural capital and deficit respectively. It further leads to the seeking of cultural solutions presumed best provided by their ethnic groups, hence the ethnic self-help organisations' existence.

Further intertwined with unequal ethnic majority-minority relations, this approach tends to be selectively biased singling out Malays and other minorities for their supposed cultural propensities in problems. How else to explain ethnic profiling, such as that reported in a news article that 48 percent of drug offenders in 2011 were Malays but not the ethnicities of the remaining 52 percent, or the absence of ethnic profiling of gambling addicts and patrons of underaged prostitutes, the vast majority of whom are Chinese?

This 'institutionalised' racism has its rationale based on claims of 'objective' fact and reality or simplistic comparisons by ethnicity. It disclaims bigotry and lacks historical and sociological understanding as to why Malay numbers are high in drug addiction or Chinese predominate in gambling addiction, but will consistently highlight the Malay proportions. Thus, some among the Chinese majority are likely not to see the ethnic profiling of Malays, the 'ability to speak Mandarin' requirement for jobs, or speaking in Mandarin for work matters in the presence of non-Chinese colleagues as racist, discriminatory or insensitive. That minority members encounter job discrimination due to 'race' and language (the top two complaints received by the Tripartite Alliance for Fair Employment) escapes them. For those Chinese with an ethnicised approach, it is about possessing superior, powerful or numerical majority cultural values, resources and knowledge. But for some minorities on the receiving end, racism can be internalised, with negative self-perceptions of inadequacy, stigmatisation, marginalisation and fatalism.

The singling out of Malays is particularly ignominious, with roots in history and prejudice – the 'lazy native' worldview and an ethnic division of labour during colonial rule – now sustained by structural inequalities, policies and ethnicised approaches. The resultant reality is one in which Malays disproportionately constitute the poor in

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Singapore and are more affected by problems such as unemployment, homelessness and educational difficulties but the dominant view is that they have only themselves to blame. Post-September 11, Islamophobia and other developments such as Islamic militancy elsewhere have added a new layer of prejudice and suspicion against Malays and Muslims.

Racism is notorious for entrenching inequality and poverty which in turn exacerbates it and causes ethnic tensions. Today's concern is that racism will get worse with growing inequalities that have widened income gaps and reduced economic mobility and the workings of meritocracy. So how do we address ethnic divisions and issues towards their reduction and solution and towards equality and cohesiveness?

The state racialised CMIO model has been severely critiqued for its essentialism, rigidity, and the consequences of ethnic consciousness and divisiveness. However, state demarcation of 'race' and religion with out-of-bounds (OB) markers and a highly punitive legislative approach generate fear and censorship, making some issues difficult to be discussed publicly. But viewing inequalities in ethnic majority-minority terms has its own dangers – it implies that majority equals oppressor and minority equals oppressed and stereotypes members of both.

An opening up of discussion, civilly and safely, is overdue and which needs to question and go beyond current cultural frameworks and interpretations. Issues should be addressed for what they are – as social and national issues. Specific ethnic dimensions should be included where they are judged significant and relevant. They are not always useless or harmful when analysing problems and seeking solutions. It is how they are used in intersection with other key social indicators and in context and appropriate to the issue at hand.

Equality in citizenship is a core principle in multiculturalism. As such, there must be fair and just treatment for all and this must be perceived to be so. The Government must take the lead in not racialising socio-economic problems and addressing structural inequalities as national problems. With regard to Malay citizens, there is one other specific issue to address - loyalty and belonging. The doubt on Malays' loyalty to Singapore is a ghost from the past that must be put to rest immediately.

Immigration, integration and citizenship

The tremendous scale, speed and intensity of recent immigration have enlarged and complicated the minefield of Singapore's diversity and multiculturalism profoundly. In 2012, Singapore's population had grown to

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5.31 million from 4.028 million in 2000 and 3.047 million in 1990, with the increase due mainly to the new citizen, permanent resident and foreign worker populations under the government's immigration policy to sustain economic growth and to address declining fertility and an ageing population. The majority of immigrants are Chinese-Malaysians, People's Republic of China (PRC) Chinese and Indians who fall into two broad categories – skilled 'foreign talent' and unskilled 'foreign workers' – that receive differential offers of permanent settlement and permanent transience respectively.

Problems arising from immigration have come home to roost quickly. Immigration-linked economic, social and cultural issues reflect disconnects, tensions and divides between locals and immigrants along intertwining ethnic, nationality and class lines and pose challenges to integration, cohesion and citizenship. They also serve to question the sensibility of current immigration policy and the government's vision of development.

Locals have been criticised for their treatment of unskilled foreign workers: employers for flouting employment laws, abuse, exploitation, and not respecting their human rights; and ordinary Singaporeans for intolerance, prejudice, racism particularly towards darker-skinned immigrants and xenophobia particularly towards the PRC Chinese.

On the other hand, locals have been raising economic and social issues such as depressed wages, soaring housing prices, high costs of living and over-stretched public facilities linked to immigration, discrimination in favour of 'foreign talent' and unfair competition in education such as through places and scholarships allocated to foreign students. Locals also complain about immigrants' anti-social behaviour and their disregard for local norms, as well as question the loyalty of internationally mobile immigrants who take up citizenship and permanent residence for 'strategic' reasons. Some citizens feel overwhelmed and displaced in their sense of familiarity, place and social order that they have established over time and generations prior to the arrival of immigrants. Some also feel that the government lacks understanding of citizens' concerns and adds insult to injury in its calls to locals to welcome foreigners. Some controversial behaviour by individual immigrants such as in the 'curry' incident (2011), the 'PRC scholar' incident, the 'Ferrari' incident and the 'Amy Cheong' saga (all occuring in 2012) have further served as lightning rods that convey online resentment against immigration. In general, issues and sentiments about immigration are raised by Singaporeans of diverse class and ethnic backgrounds. Indigenous Malays additionally express unhappiness over the framing of Singapore as an 'immigrant' society and over the large influx of PRC Chinese which they see as

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further Sinification of an already Chinese-dominant Singapore.

The minefield that massive immigration has created is challenging to navigate, as both locals and immigrants claim rights and responsibilities. Mutual adjustments and the rules of civility-hospitality and openness apply equally to both sides. However, immigrants additionally need to make adjustments to prevent enclave formation. They also need to see their presence in Singapore beyond their personal contributions, qualifications, experiences, interests, rights and sacrifices. They need to learn more about local and regional diversities in histories, cultures and norms which precede their arrival. The dominant idea that Singapore is an immigrant society is contestable. Many Malays are indigenous while others with backgrounds of earlier immigrant generations should be viewed as having distinct local histories, cultures and identities. Cultural similarities between locals and immigrants should not be assumed, imagined or exaggerated, such as under 'Chinese-ness' or 'Chinese diaspora'. For Indian and Chinese immigrants, their official classification under the same ethnic categories as local ethnic Indians and Chinese is a misfit that is based on false assumptions of common cultural identities. This can lead to misplaced judgements and expectations of common values and behaviour and

relatively problem-free cultural integration such as between local and PRC Chinese.

Locals' anxieties over immigration can be easily viewed as 'anti-immigrant'. Indeed, there are prejudiced, racist and xenophobic individuals. However, the unpacking of their sentiments shows reasonable grounds for their strong feelings against massive immigration. Taken together, their anxieties are about being disadvantaged by economic competition and social citizenship, and should not be confused as inherently 'anti-immigrant'. There is resentment but thus far no coherent nationalistic ideology against immigrants or organised efforts calling for their expulsion. In general, locals are not against immigration *per se* but are for a review of immigration policy's excessive openness and its consequences. Nor have there been any major acts of provocation and violence against immigrants. On the contrary, there are strong ground practices and codes of civility including hospitality, tolerance and conflict avoidance, for convivial social interaction and the maintenance of social order. Honed through generations of intergroup and interpersonal relations, these are increasingly tested as massive immigration disrupts, destabilises and complicates the more gradual processes of multiculturalism already in place.

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The economics of massive immigration within Singapore's intensely competitive environment has brought about new dimensions of inequality and unfairness, while the cultural politics of race, space and place play out in divisive ways. Before new economic and population targets are set and rationalised, the lessons from immigration ought to be clearly learnt. Immigration and population policies, citizens' concerns and interests, economic growth and distribution issues — how these and other major issues are addressed in the foreseeable future will affect the conduciveness or adversity of conditions for local-immigrant relations. For multiculturalism to prevail and to ensure extreme nationalism does not take root, immigration needs to be carefully managed. Two principles ought to be remembered. One is that immigrants, once they are allowed to enter Singapore, are entitled to decent and dignified treatment. The other is that Singapore is not merely a convenient global city for people to flow in and out but a country where citizenship and belonging is what is meaningful, rightful and at the heart of it.

Conclusion

I write in a time of flux in which disconnects and divides threaten multiculturalism and cohesion. A cohesive multiculturalism involves strong bonds and stakeholdership in which society's members, irrespective of cultural differences, must feel they belong to it, have a stake in it and are involved in its development. It also involves civil negotiation for a citizenship that must be seen to embrace and manage differences in an equal and fair manner. A cohesive multicultural society is not without divisions, tensions or conflicts, but these should not be overwhelming and frequent and there should be many effective ways – through institutions, mechanisms and attitudes – to reduce or eliminate them. The minimum conditions of tolerance without abuse and maximum conditions of inclusion, exchange and appreciation should apply.

The future of Singapore's multi-culturalism is hard to predict as its maze-minefield terrain is inherently and increasingly challenging to navigate. But what makes Singapore exceptional is its unique form of diversity and multiculturalism. Those who choose to live and remain in it will understand its essences and possibilities. We need to see the cup positively as half full. May Malay weddings, lion dances and cultural events always grace our public spaces as symbols of Singapore's multiculturalism.

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About the Author

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Singaporean Cultural Mandate

Imagining Singapore 2030: Language, Demographics and the Region

*By **Yang Razali Kassim***

Imagining Singapore 2030: Language, Demographics and the Region

Preamble: Vision 2030

As Singaporeans embark on a rare moment of introspection and ponder their future in a national exercise called 'Our Singapore Conversation', one question must not be forgotten: How will we look like to the outside world, especially the immediate region, by 2030? To put it in another way: What kind of Singapore will it be from the perspectives of our neighbours three decades from now? Will we become even more enmeshed with our surroundings? Or will we, on the contrary, become more different, more distant and more detached and aloof from our neighbours? Whichever way it turns out, will the future face of Singapore strengthen or compromise the Republic's position as a nation-state by 2030?

These are fundamental questions. In fact, they are as fundamental as the ones that modern Singapore's founding fathers grappled with since independence in 1965. The answers will depend very much on how Singapore society will have evolved three decades hence. Needless to say, so much already has changed over the last six decades since Singapore was thrust into existence as an independent state in a region that was ambivalent to, if not unsure of, its arrival. Yet, there are clear constants that have defined, and will continue to define, Singapore as it moves forward. The primary and overriding constant is its survival as a

nation-state, the key determinants of which are political stability and economic viability, both in turn dependent on the cohesion of the various communities.

Arising from these constants, government leaders proclaim without fail three unchanging principles of governance - multiracialism, multiculturalism and meritocracy - which guide the Singaporean nation-state through the choppy waters of time as a polyglot nation. These three principles have shaped the process of nation-building as the founding leaders of Singapore walked a tightrope between forging a multiethnic, multi-religious and multicultural nation and pursuing their early politics of identity, at the heart of which were language and culture.

Generational Change and Continuity

The evolution of Singaporean society has gone through two generations – the Lee Kuan Yew era and the Goh Chok Tong era – and is now being steered through the third, the Lee Hsien Loong era. Prime Minister (PM) Lee has recently signalled that he does not expect to be in office till age 70. In other words, before 2030, there will be a new prime minister. When PM Lee hands over to his successor, the transition will be just as equally shaped by the forces of change and continuity: Like his two predecessors, PM Lee will be stepping down in his 60s but unlike them, he will be handing over to a

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leader who, for the first time, will come from the post-independence generation.

But what will the Lee Hsien Loong era leave behind and what kind of nation will the next PM take over? How similar or how different will the fourth PM be from his predecessors? Will he stick to the principles of governance and leadership that have guided Singapore since independence? How will the new leader balance the imperative of leading Singaporeans into the uncharted future while not forgetting the past so that the Singapore of 2030 is not something totally strange?

Language, Politics and the Region

There will be many challenges, of course, as the future PM straddles between change and continuity. However, one of the unbending core issues three decades from now will be the role of language in nation building in a country that will be increasingly diverse due to immigration. In this respect, there is one convention that has always been upheld but seldom talked about and yet, is actually significant. At the National Day Rally (NDR) in August 2012, PM Lee spoke in three languages – Malay, Mandarin and English – in that order. They were not mere translations of the same speech but messages tailored specifically to the different audiences and constituencies. This sequence of speeches has been customary since the first NDR after independence in 1965. Presumably, the

rationale is to signify Malay as the national language, Mandarin as the language of the majority ethnic group in Singapore and English as the working language of all Singaporeans. Together with Tamil, the three make up the four official languages. Indeed, upholding the same language policy can also be observed at the annual conferences of the ruling People's Action Party (PAP), where the Party's Secretary-General, who is the PM, similarly speaks in the three languages, and in that order.

Why did the PM still speak in Malay first instead of English or Mandarin? It was a political statement, no doubt. PM Lee was continuing a conscious policy that, at first glance, is more symbolic than substantive. Like his two predecessors Mr Lee Kuan Yew and Mr Goh Chok Tong, PM Lee was upholding the national language – something he has been doing without fail at every NDR since he became PM in 2004. Yet, if we think more deeply about it, we will realise that the symbolism is loaded with subtle signals about what we are as a nation.

Whenever the PM speaks in Malay – and Malay first – it is no exaggeration to say that it evokes a certain emotion – for Singaporeans as a whole because their PM has that rare mastery of languages to connect with the people; for the Malays in Singapore, whom the Constitution recognises as the indigenous people because the PM

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speaks their language; and for the political leadership because the PM is able to send a powerful, though unstated message about the genesis, history and uniqueness of Singapore as a nation-state. In an age of instant and global communication, it is a message that is invariably heard around the region and increasingly at the people level as well. For instance, in a blog posted in the *EC Malaysian Blog* entitled 'PM Lee's Malay Speech at National Day Rally 2012', blogger ECGMA writes: "PM Lee Hsien Loong speaks the Malay language impressively, better than many of us in Malaysia, including local politicians and me!".

Beyond the symbolism, the subtext between the lines each time the PM delivers his annual direction-setting address in Malay, followed by Mandarin and English, comes in layered meanings for two different audiences. For Singaporeans, the first and probably the most significant is that despite four decades of independence, Singapore does not forget its roots. It may be a legacy of Singapore's early political history forged by the battle for merger with Malaysia that Malay remains the national language. But it is a legacy that also has its utility as a unifier of a multicultural nation. Thus the national anthem is still in Malay and uniformed groups – the military, police and civil defence – go by drill commands in Malay. While it is true that all these

are largely perfunctory, they remain a key shaper of the consciousness of Singaporeans of where they belong in their collective memory as one people in spite of their diverse origins. Equally important is the message to the outside world that Singapore sees itself very much a part of Southeast Asia, despite being an independent and highly globalised nation-state which is majority ethnic Chinese located in a Malay sea. There is an unstated reason for this display of tolerance and mutual accommodation – to be the living antithesis of whoever is not tolerant or accommodating. There is yet another rationale, best captured in the words of Singapore's first prime minister.

On 3 October 1965, two months after separation from Malaysia, the man who was responsible for the national language policy, then PM Lee Kuan Yew, said, "Why have we to accept Malay as our National Language? For on principle, that is correct. Why must we have four languages, and at the same time let them have an equal position? The reason is, this is good for our country. We can become a model, not only for the whole of Southeast Asia to see, but also for the Afro-Asian countries to see." A year later, at the opening of a Tamil school on 19 December 1966, Mr Lee expanded on this, spelling out the need to give space to each community its language, culture and identity, "But to each also must be given the maximum of common denominators without which you and I

will never be able to understand each other…And so it is that we have designated that Malay should be our National Language."

In other words, the Malay language was meant to be the bridge linking the various communities even as all the main languages are given equal status. By making Malay his first language of delivery at every NDR, the current PM signals that this policy remains valid. The message for Singaporeans is this: Even as the little red dot continues to differentiate itself from the region as a strategy for survival, using Malay as the national language is a core policy as provided for in the Constitution. It is an important signal that while Singapore will be increasingly different as it evolves into a future entity, it will still be anchored to the region and its past in terms of its identity as a nation-state. It is a fine balancing act whose deep significance will only be appreciated when lost.

So, will the future PM in 2030 be able to perpetuate this policy? More importantly, will the next PM want to continue this policy? Will he have the felicity for the language to help him sustain it and communicate his vision, policies and ethos, bearing in mind that he will be a product of post-Separation Singapore in which Malay as the national language is more symbolic than functional? How will the Government uphold this constitutional imperative in

the face of the demographic trends currently sweeping Singapore which will have significant bearing on the future?

Impact of Changing Demographics

On 29 January this year, the Government stunned Singaporeans with a White Paper that projected a population growth of up to 6.9 million by 2030, up from the current 5.3 million. Describing 2012 as a turning point in the trend towards an ageing society, it was disclosed that almost half the projected population will comprise foreigners as the government pursues a policy of active though moderated immigration to offset the declining demographics. After intense debate in Parliament and within an anxious populace, the Government adopted an amended White Paper, moderating the projected population growth. The anxieties of Singaporeans over the impact and implications of the demographic trends however, remain strong at the people level, having surfaced as a major political issue in the last general election of 2011. National leaders stress that immigration is critical to the survival of Singapore in the long term. Yet, as with most countries receiving immigration, this trend is causing restiveness and a sense of disempowerment. But the fear of further political backlash on the PAP government has led to the pace of immigration being tempered, even as the broader policy of remaining open to immigration is sustained. At the same

time, we are beginning to feel the palpable sense of unease and dislocation leading to Singaporean society coming closer together. 'Core Singaporeans' – those born and bred in Singapore – are seeking comfort in each other as they adjust to what they feel as unsettling change. In the process, we are noticing a heightened sense of common identity among the core Singaporeans. PM Lee spoke of how we are beginning to see Singaporean-Chinese being different from China-Chinese, Singaporean-Indians being different from India-Indians, and possibly Singaporean-Malays too from other Southeast Asian-Malays. In the cyberworld, we see the forging of the Singaporean identity being reinforced by the unpleasant side effects of immigration, and people developing closer bonds amongst themselves as core Singaporeans.

The best example of this is the Amy Cheong controversy which saw non-Malay Singaporeans coming to the defence of Malay Singaporeans in the face of what was described as the racist rantings of the Malaysia-born Australian Amy Cheong who was unhappy with the noise from Malay weddings held in Housing & Development Board (HDB) void decks. Even PM Lee had to come down on her. If the Amy Cheong saga is any indicator of the future, the core Singaporeans from the different communities will increasingly huddle together and seek comfort in their common bonds in the face of

discomforting change. Notice how Singaporeans of diferent races became uneasy with Singapore Mass Rapid Transit's (SMRT) attempt to translate the names of local train stations from English into Mandarin only, ostensibly to make it easier for tourists from China. The growing clamour for more sensitivity towards local feelings forced SMRT to drop the project.

Going Forward

In the years to come, as the pressures of demographic change increase and as Singaporeans clutch at straws that can bind them even more closely as well as anchor them for a sense of stability, they will see the value of the bridges that forge their common Singaporean identity. Such bonds will take many forms. These will inevitably include the languages that they have grown up with and been moulded by – be they English, Mandarin, Tamil, Malay and even *Singlish*. And it is under such future circumstances that the role of the national language may prove its utility as the glue that it was always meant to be. Will the national language still be upheld then or will the tide of immigration lead to its further erosion or neglect? Should we allow this to happen?

Indeed, will English remain the working language in Singapore as the rise of China leads to its economic preponderance? Will immigration over time lead to the emergence of a generation of 'new Singaporeans' who do not have a strong

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appreciation or attachment, if at all, to the history that made Singapore unique such that a minority language can become the national language? Will there be the political will on the part of future leaderships to retain Malay as the national language to bind the multiracial and multicultural nation?

As we ponder our future, we may have to consider the fundamental forces that keep the idea of a Singaporean Singapore alive – and the uniqueness that makes Singapore what it is today. There may well be a need to 'revive' the national language beyond its current symbolic role precisely because of the need to bind anew everyone – including the new citizens – to the idea of a Singaporean Singapore. In schools where future generations are shaped, our children, be they the offsprings of core or new Singaporeans, will need to be exposed in a more purposeful way to the importance of all the major languages – including the national language. As one Singaporean Chinese blogger, *gintai*, says in his post entitled 'Malay is still the National Language of Singapore': "I feel that if Malay is accorded with the National Language status, then it should be treated as such. Not only our National Anthem is sung in Malay on National Day or on other official occasions, it is also the language of command in the armed forces. It should be much more than that."

As Asia rises further by 2030, driven by new economic powers such as China, India and possibly Indonesia, the government's long-standing language policy of giving equal treatment to the four languages while making Malay the national language will increasingly prove far-sighted. In recent years, students have been allowed to take up third languages for their economic value. In future, as Singapore plugs further into the globalised world and language options are widened, there may be a need to strengthen the anchoring and stabilising role of the national language. While Chinese, Indian and students of other races should feel free to take up Malay as the national language, Malay students should fortify their own mother tongue and at the same time not feel inhibited to take up Mandarin or even Indian languages as a third language so that they too will benefit from the rising influence of the new economic powers. In this way, the Singapore of the 21st century will rise with Asia and yet remain the cohesive nation-state that it is meant to be.

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Singaporean Cultural Mandate

Tracking Signs of the 'Sacred' in Singapore

By Vineeta Sinha

Tracking Signs of the 'Sacred' in Singapore

Introduction

The constitution and design of Singapore, from its founding as a trading port in 1819 through colonial times, to nationhood and into the present, have been dominated by the discourse of planning. The idea of land scarcity referring to natural resources as well as limited physical dimensions) has also seen the state assume sole responsibility for making decisions about how available land is to be utilised, producing a situation of bureaucratic control of land use in Singapore. Students of religion typically survey and count religious structures and this accounting is used as a register of urban religiosity. In this paper, I map urban religiosity in Singapore by looking beyond 'places of worship' as sacred spaces to discover or uncover other urban sites/spaces/locations where sacred indicators have been inserted and embedded. Here I distinguish between 'places of worship' and what I denote as 'signs of the sacred'. A focus on the latter enables a more inclusive mapping of the field as it captures ostensibly secular spaces which are marked by sacred signs. This short paper tracks signs of the 'sacred' in the densely populated urban city of Singapore.

Finding Spaces for Gods in the City

Singapore is a planned city and an urban environment *par excellence*. Yet,

urban planning for the island has been far from totalistic, universal and absolute in its reach. There is firm evidence that the planning and spatial ordering of the island have been fragmented and selective. As such, numerous physical sites across the island have 'escaped' land planning exercises and urban renewal initiatives. Religious structures may be 'places of worship', represent sacrality or house physical representations of divinity, in the form of shrines, altars, temples, churches, *suraus* and mosques. In Singapore, the intersecting discourses of urban density, land scarcity and urban congestion and the need for urban renewal, modernity and development, have historically confronted the widespread desire amongst citizens to secure 'spaces for their gods' in the built environment of cities. Geographers, sociologists, anthropologists and urban planners alike have been drawn to theorise Singapore's urban religiosity. By now their scholarly efforts have produced a body of scholarship on the subject and narrate a familiar story. We know of the state's policy on land use with respect to allocation, building, demolition and acquisition of land for religious structures (Kong, 1993) in which religious structures receive less priority as compared to collective secular concern relating to housing, education and health needs of the citizenry. With regard to provision of space for places of worship, various statements have

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reassured the citizenry that the government will ensure that adequate land will be made available (particularly in the Housing & Development Board (HDB) estates) as far as possible. But it is also clear that religious communities do not receive any special treatment or favours in this regard (ibid) but instead have to abide by the rules of the market in securing parcels of land, what more at a price, for their edifices. We also know that government pronouncements about land in general and specifically for community and religious purposes have consistently highlighted its scarcity, its immense value and the need to use it rationally (Sinha, 2003). The idea that Singapore is 'land starved' is part of this discourse and Singaporeans are implored to accept the fact of 'land constraints'. The urban renewal programme, initiated in the 1960s, with its discourse of a forward-looking and progressive orientation has confronted, literally and/or physically, the existing built environment of the city and claimed as victims a range of religious structures. Having to 'make way' for modernity and development has raised problems about whether 'places of worship' can have any permanency of existence in the city. Religious structures and edifices affected by urbanisation are constantly sourcing for appropriate locations with some having moved into unconventional 'secular' sites (for example former cinemas, community centres, auditoriums, homes,

commercial spaces and so on). One notices that churches, mosques and temples face the twin problems of being 'homeless' and 'mobile' reflecting the transience and impermanence of their existence, thereby illustrating the tensions in the location of scared spaces in a secular realm. Indeed, concerns about where sacred sites can be located in the city and for how long with any degree of certainty pose challenges for religious communities. If public spaces are not legitimately provided for sacred sites, where in cities can gods be lawfully housed? Which alternative 'spaces' can then be identified as being suitable for habitation by gods and thus appropriated?

A brief historical gaze is helpful for grounding the present discussion. By the 1950s, the physical landscape of Singapore was marked with sacred sites and religious structures of a wide variety of shapes and sizes across a range of numerous religious traditions. Some of these were 'proper' places of worship while others were less formalised and appeared in public - outside homes, in residential units, within places of work, along pathways and roads, under trees or along the railway tracks for example. Many of these were subsequently labelled 'unauthorised structures', but their 'unsanctioned' status was not an issue until they literally got in the way of development projects. I contend that

these sites remained unmarked, in part due to their location in 'outlying', rural parts of Singapore but also because their presence was not then a 'problem'. They thus seemed to remain outside the purview of administrative and planning concerns and were in fact rendered invisible. In fact, this official 'deliberate knowing non-attention' to illegitimate religious structures is an exercise of ultimate state power, merely giving the impression that the authorities are unaware of their existence. Indeed, these religious structures and their locations continued to exist and grow in Singapore well into the 1960s and 1970s, until their presence became 'problematic' due to the potential development utility of sites they occupied. Fundamental to the idea of planning is the imposition of order and structure and hence control over physical landscapes, the built environment, the populations within as well as the practices they engaged in. The continued existence of these sites and practices has been crucial for enabling a particular form of religiosity on the island of an animistic variety, which has been clearly affected by alterations in the physical landscape of the island more recently.

Against this background, a turn to the present and a survey of the religious landscape of the island is revealing, instructive and perhaps, reassuring. Singaporeans have witnessed aggressive urban renewal initiatives in the last 40 years. These have not only reconfigured

the island's physical landscape but also erased individual and collective memories of places and practices that 'used to be there'. In the course of my research on religion in Singapore (and Hinduism in particular) over the last two decades, I have had the opportunity to observe the island's religious landscape and document both its dynamics and the shifts within. The ethnographic data I have collected from Singaporean Hindu domains point to the existence of a range of informal sites, which I have called 'home temples' and 'jungle temples', in addition to registered Hindu temples. In these 'unregulated sacred spaces', devotees are free to express their religiosity and where one witnesses some resistance to attempts to standardise or centralise worship (Sinha, 2005). I have spoken of these domains as 'realms of possibility' and suggested that they have emerged as alternative spaces for housing deities in urban centres such as Singapore where land is scarce and more importantly, too expensive for individuals to secure exclusively and permanently for religious purposes. I see these as strategic innovations and to some extent, as expressions of resistance to bureaucratic, state-led and often ideological (led by official Hindu bodies) attempts to streamline, sanitise and ultimately, eliminate plural conceptions of sacred spaces and more importantly, a range of religious practices.

In the midst of dramatic spatial reconfigurations of the island, I find it

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striking that these 'signs of the sacred' continue to be visible despite urban renewal efforts that have culminated in erasing many 'unauthorised' religious structures and the styles of religiosity carried therein. So in contemporary Singapore, where does one find the 'sacred' in the city? The sites I discuss next will no doubt be familiar to Singaporeans who are the very agents whose everyday religious practices embody and produce evidence of the 'sacred' outside of religious structures. This material also allows me to highlight unconventional, alternative, 'third' spaces that religious practitioners colonise and which are infused with religious meaning, thus 'messing up' the carefully demarcated and policed boundaries between secular and sacred sites. Methodologically, the lessons in this notice are enormous for throwing wide open sites where one looks for evidence of religious expressions in the modern, urban landscape.

The incidence of using 'secular' spaces for religious events is neither new in Singapore nor unfamiliar to Singaporeans. We know of various religious festivals, for example, religious processions that are held in sports stadiums given the restrictions on foot processions along public roads. In other innovations, the Shri Krishna Mandir in Singapore organised its 'Boat Festival – the Boat ride of Sri Sri Radha Madana Mohan' – on 3 September 2006 at the Jalan Besar Swimming Complex, an event which was literally held in the swimming pool! While these are interesting creative strategies, they are episodic and occur intermittently. In contrast, in the sites I discuss next, one sees the embeddedness and insertion of sacred signs and symbols in secular spaces that function to reproduce everyday life in Singapore. I begin with the observation that the 'signs of the sacred' are pervasive in a myriad of secular sites across the island. In my survey, these latter include commercial spaces (cafes, restaurants, provision and sundry stores, jewelry shops), public car parks, hawker centres and wet markets, residential spaces (open fields and car parks in HDB estates), construction sites, industrial spaces, pavements and road intersections as well as the base of trees along roads and highways. It is important to highlight that these are functioning and active sacred sites which are utilised by individuals in the course of their daily lives.

To begin, hawker centres and wet markets are sites that continue to be marked by sacred signs across religious traditions. For example, the altar for the Taoist deity, *Tua Pek Kong*, at Clementi Avenue 2 sits in makeshift premises as the hawker centre and wet market (its permanent site) is currently undergoing renovation. Yet, even in this moment of transformation, the altar has been sustained by devotees on a daily basis. On the days that I visited the site, I have seen lighted oil candles and joss sticks, fresh oranges and other food offerings

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Figure 1

placed before the deity (Figure 1), not to mention a number of devotees praying at the altar. The grand altar of *Tua Pek Kong*, sitting between the hawker centre and the wet market at the Ghim Moh Market (Figures 2 and 3), tells the same story. The altar was established and is sustained by the hawkers and stall holders for a deity, who I was told is 'in charge of everything – floor, land, people, business' and for whom an elaborate festival is held in July every year. This is an active site with customers and stall-

holders alike offering prayers at the altar. In a final example, over at Tekka Market (Figure 4), tucked away in the corner on the second floor (which is populated by a mix of Indian and Chinese merchants) is an elaborate altar that houses

Figure 2

Figure 4

Figure 3

representations of Hindu and Taoist deities (Figure 5). I was told that this altar is estimated to be 10 years old and was established by an Indian merchant. The altar is now 'patronised' by all businesses who collectively maintain it. In addition to the Hindu deity *Ganesh*, there are images of *Kuan Yin*, Monkey God and Buddha before whom fresh flowers, fruits and lighted oil candles and joss sticks are placed. On days of my visits to the site, an audio recording of devotional Hindu songs and mantras was audible and I have seen a number of Indian and Chinese devotees offering prayers at the altar. Another space where I have seen small and large altars of the Taoist deity, *Tua Pek Kong*, are the public car parks (many of which are in the basement of buildings). The altar at the entrance of the basement car park of Holland Village Shopping Centre is a typical example (Figure 6). Again this is an active site and had been founded by the individual who manages the premises, a scene that is replicated in numerous car parks across the island.

A visit to restaurants and shops in Singapore's Little India shows how easily and comfortably religious altars find a place in commercial establishments. An assortment of big and small religious altars housing a range of divine representations are visible alongside or behind cash registers in many Indian restaurants in the area. Gold and jewellery stores (run largely by members of the ethnic Chinese community) are also marked by the prominent presence of altars carrying Hindu and non-Hindu

Figure 5

Figure 6

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divinity, which are ritually attended to with fresh flowers, fruits and Indian sweetmeats (Figure 7). It is less common to find sacred signs in industrial spaces but I know of at least one Hindu temple that has been housed within such premises. I have also seen makeshift religious altars in construction sites which last as long as work is being done but which cease to exist thereafter. These are dedicated to gods of the Hindu, Taoist or Buddhist pantheon and often established by Indian or Thai construction workers. In the past, it was rather common to find religious altars along roadsides, under trees or set up in open public spaces. The opportunities for such practices have diminished in the present but have not disappeared entirely. One conspicuous example is found at the junction of Clive Street and Dickson Road in Little India (Figure 8). Here, one finds a set of three shrines that,

Figure 7

I was told by its caretaker, were set up about 60 years ago. The shrines, dedicated to the deity *Tua Pek Kong* and *Na Tuk Kong* (tree deity), sit under a cluster of trees in full public view. I was told that the site has by now achieved a visibility and reputation having been featured in a number of local magazines and brochures, including being acknowledged by the Singapore Tourism Board and the local media. The site is popular with Thai workers and a sign (written in Thai) displayed at the shrine implores devotees to not make any offerings of pork to the deities. Other offerings, however, are welcome and when I visited the site, I saw a regular stream of visitors who come to pray and also

Figure 8

make donations for the upkeep of the shrines. These instances of deliberate and straightforward incorporation of sacred symbols in otherwise profane spaces challenges and problematises the simplistic 'sacred-secular' dichotomy. Given the evidence presented, sites I have just described cannot continue to be defined as either 'sacred' or 'profane'; rather these spaces are layered with shades of both secularity and religiosity, which find easy co-location in the **same site**.

Appropriating Urban Spaces for Religious Purposes

The approach adopted here has been inspired, in part, by an apparently simple question posed by Elizabeth McAlister, "How shall we think about and talk about studying religion and place" (2005:249)? Scholars have questioned how religions are grounded in urban spaces and the latter re-imagined consequently (Siemiatycki, 2005) as well as articulated the shape of everyday religion in modern societies (Ammerman, 2007) in terms of how individuals experience religion and how these are manifested in a set of social institutions. The data presented here suggest that individuals are able to reclaim these public spaces through alternatives meanings and symbolism that are assigned to them. The contestations over physical space reveal the collision of religious and secularist ideologies. How does one

challenge or negotiate these inevitable processes of modernity and urbanisation without eliminating places of worship? Are these two value systems necessarily incompatible and irreconcilable? There are good counter-examples from Singapore and Malaysia to the idea that modernity must be hostile and antithetical to religious sensibilities. Could these instances present a model that allows for the successful and feasible embedding of religious sites within otherwise secular, modern spaces? The evidence presented here shows that religious practitioners can negotiate the constraints of urban, cosmopolitan, multiethnic milieu. One strategy is for individuals to colonise existing spaces for religious use and *'to create or make space'* for their religious needs. Many of the sites I have listed can be seen as private spaces, which in the Singapore context are largely unregulated. But these also have a clear public character as **everyday spaces** which see individuals of diverse religious, class, ethnic background interacting. We have seen that even in densely urban settings where land is scarce and highly valued and its use highly rationalised, individuals can and do find ways and means of inserting 'signs of the sacred' therein. This suggests also the dynamism of urban spaces which do not necessarily resist such appropriation not to mention their capacity for acknowledging a different kind of rationality, albeit within highly instrumentalist and pragmatic frames.

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Maintaining Identity in Changing Landscapes

Wild Greenery for Nature Conservation in Singapore

*By **Ho Hua Chew***

Wild Greenery for Nature Conservation in Singapore

Introduction

The economic progress of Singapore has generated the impression throughout the world and among visitors that Singapore is a global city crammed with high-rise almost everywhere. This impression is also inculcated in the minds of most locals by the litany of pronouncements from the government and professional circle that Singapore is land-scarce. Undoubtedly, Singapore is a relatively small nation but this does not necessarily entail land scarcity.

Singapore's Remaining Greenery

A recent satellite study by a team from National University of Singapore (NUS) reveals that the total green areas of Singapore is 56 percent (Yee, ATK et al, 2011). Out of these, 27 percent is actively managed areas such as parks, gardens, lawns, golf courses etc, and 29 percent is 'spontaneous' or what I would call 'wild vegetation'. Out of the 29 percent of 'spontaneous' or 'wild vegetation', the majority (22.5 percent) is forest of various types, including mangrove (0.9 percent) and freshwater swamp forest (0.4 percent). The rest are scrubland (5.9 percent) and freshwater marshland (0.1 percent), both of these making a total of about 6 percent.

This is astounding to most Singaporeans, more so when a collaborative satellite study by Centre for Remote Imaging, Sensing and Processing (CRISP) and NUS reveals that the total green area has actually increased by 11 percent from 1986 to 2007 (*The Straits Times*, 25 June 2008). A large portion of this comes from the greening of the reclaimed lands that are lying fallow for several decades, such as at Pulau Tekong and the Changi Coast.

These satellite studies have generated optimism among nature conservationists that there is still enough room for biodiversity conservation, given that about half of Singapore is still undeveloped or not covered in concrete. This is bolstered by the sightings of nationally endangered wildlife not only within the forested Nature Reserves but outside their boundaries as well, most notable being that of the Oriental Pied Hornbill, the Straw-headed Bulbul and the Sunda Pangolin with the last two listed in the International Union for the Conservation of Nature's (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species.

The Singapore Green Plan

For Singapore, such a concern for more nature conservation effort is not unwarranted as only about 5 percent of the total land area inclusive of reclaimed lands comes under the 'Nature Reserve' designation (MEWR, 2009). These are: Bukit Timah, Central Catchment, Labrador and Sungei Buloh, which have a statutory protection status. And as such, have a stronger level of protection compared with the other areas

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recognised as of biodiversity importance in The Singapore Green Plan (SGP) but are designated merely as 'Nature Areas'. 'Nature Areas' are officially understood to be areas that are to be left untouched only so long as they are not required for development. In this scenario, the future survival of the 'Nature Areas' will be completely subjected to economic vagaries. This has come about for 'Nature Areas' in the original SGP (1993) like Khatib Bongsu (South Simpang), Mandai Mangroves, Pulau Semakau as well as for the four Coral Zones (St John, Hantu, Sudong and Semakau), which were all delisted in the revised SGP (2012) to leave them open in the immediate future for development plans. The remaining 'Nature Areas' are either completely designated as nature parks (eg Kranji Marshes Park) or are patches of wild greenery within established public parks (eg Serapong and Mount Embiah in Sentosa).

According to National Parks, for Singapore as a whole, only "10 percent of the land … is set aside for nature reserves and parks…." (*The Straits Times*, 25 June 2008). This is carefully clarified in the government's Sustainable Singapore Blueprint, that "out of this 10 percent of Singapore's land committed as green space, only about half are gazetted nature reserves" (MEWR, 2009). Given this statement, one would not expect more than 5 percent of Singapore be dedicated to the protection of nature or biodiversity that comes with setting up

nature reserves. The government has announced recently that 20 new parks will be created over the next five years, but this will merely add to the "green space" for public parks (*The Straits Times,* 19 February 2012) – if the total area involved has not been already included in the Blueprint estimate for public parks.

Biodiversity in the Unprotected Forests

Whatever may be the case, there should be more attention given to the conservation of natural habitats and its wildlife. Of these, the mangrove forest demands urgent attention, given that only about 1 percent of the original 13 percent that existed when Stamford Raffles landed in 1819, is left with the larger remnants at Sungei Buloh Nature Park, Pulau Ubin and Pulau Tekong. Although relatively very small in the global context, they harbour a total of 35 'true' mangrove species, which amounts to about half of such identified by IUCN. There is only one known species extinction so far. Although small in area, these mangrove patches can have surprises. For example, *Bruguiera hainesii* listed in the IUCN Red List as critically endangered with 250 mature individuals extant globally, has been found recently in Singapore (Yang et al, 2011). Mangroves with their intertidal zones are also important habitat for wetland wildlife, such as the local critically endangered mammals, the Smooth and the Small-clawed Otters. At Sungei Mandai, for example, apart from

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the presence of many locally endangered tree mangrove species such as *Sonneratia ovata*, *Intsia bijuga*, *Lumnitzera racemosa* etc, such wetland habitat is also important as a feeding ground for migratory shorebirds (plovers, sandpipers, egrets, etc), as well as a breeding ground for the Mangrove Horseshoe Crab (Friess et al, 2012). The highest density of the Mangrove Horseshoe Crab in Singapore is in this area (Cartwright-Taylor et al, 2009). The Mangrove Horseshoe Crab is now recognised by IUCN as one of the three Asian Horseshoe Crabs in urgent need for conservation action for its long-term survival.

Also of fundamental ecological importance are the unprotected 'spontaneous' or wild dryland forests outside the Nature Reserves, existing in patches of varying sizes mostly in the northern, western and eastern sector of Singapore. On a rough estimate, these come to about 18 percent of Singapore's land area (figure not given in the 2011 satellite study). Although of more recent vintage with their plant diversity lacking in the rich diversity within the Nature Reserves, some of them have been found to harbour nationally interesting and endangered wildlife, such as those located at Khatib Bongsu, Kranji, Clementi, Bukit Brown and so on. Resident Eagles, like the White-bellied Sea Eagle, the Changeable Hawk-eagle and the Grey-headed Fish Eagle have resorted to these forests in many places

for nesting sites, generally using mature Albizias (*Paraserianthes falcataria*), which are usually the tallest trees around outside the central Nature Reserves (ie Bukit Timah and the Central Catchment). The Changeable Hawk-eagle and the Grey-headed Fish Eagle are listed in The Singapore Red Data Book (RDB) as endangered (Davidson et al, 2008; Tan, 2011).

Where such forests are contiguous or close to the central Nature Reserves, they have become extra habitats and/or extended foraging grounds for many species of wildlife that are usually associated with these denser, older forests. This is apart from serving as indispensable buffers for them by reducing the edge effects (such as dehumidification, alien species intrusion, etc). For example, at Bukit Brown, which is an open cemetery in its origin decades ago but now transformed largely into a forest due to neglect, many forest bird species have been regularly sighted such as the Asian Fairy Bluebird and Red-crowned Barbet, Asian Red-eyed Bulbul and Chestnut-bellied Malkoha (Ho, 2012). While at the forest patches along the former Malayan Railway, typical forest species like the Copper-cheeked Frog and the Banded Malayan Coral Snake, a nationally vulnerable species, are surprisingly recorded (NSS, forthcoming).

Apart from the birds, other wildlife that are regarded as residing strictly in the denser forest of the central Nature

Reserves are also seeking new pastures outside it - as evident in the roadkill of a Banded Leaf Monkey along Upper Thomson Road (Andie Ang, NUS, personal communication), close to the forest at the Tagore area, as well as the recent sightings at Bukit Brown of the Malayan Colugo (NSS, 2012a) and, forest butterflies such as the Banded Line Blue (*Prosotas lutea sivoka)*, a new record for Singapore (*The Straits Times,* 2 November 2012), and the critically endangered Golden Royal (*Pseudotajuria donatana donatana*) (Anuj Jain, NUS, personal communication).

Their Importance for Wildlife Survival

In view of this, more could be done to bolster the viability of the central Nature Reserves for biodiversity by roping for conservation of other important forest areas – especially those at the Mandai Lake Road and areas north of Mandai Road, as well as the patches to the south and east of the Central Catchment such as those at Bukit Brown, Yio Chu Kang and the Tagore area. This is ecologically imperative, given the recent surge in the curtailment of these forests for housing and other developments to accommodate the officially projected increase in Singapore's population to six million or more.

Their ecological value is best appreciated in view of the fact that the protected forest in the central Nature Reserves amounts to at most about 2,000 hectares excluding the reservoirs, a very small patch of forest indeed. This, lying more or less in the heart of Singapore, is becoming to a large extent a 'habitat island', being increasingly surrounded by a sea of inhospitable landscape with the many concrete developments around its periphery. Being increasingly isolated, many of its forest-associated wildlife would be faced with isolation in their gene pool, undermining their prospect for long-term survival. Also, those species that are currently doing well and have increased their population require room for expansion once the carrying capacity of the forests for them is exhausted. Eliminating these forests and substituting them with the manicured and sparse park greenery will not bolster their survival in the longer term.

Also, these outlying forests will play an increasingly significant role as stepping stones or green corridors for forest wildlife as Singapore pushes for more economic and population growth, leading inevitably to the drastic curtailment of existing greenery. There are two aspects to this role: one, for the dispersal of forest wildlife coming down from the Malay Peninsula, and the other, for the dispersal of wildlife to the remaining forest patches in parks especially those in the Southern Ridges which are already severely fragmented and isolated by downtown expansion. That such dispersal has been going on over the decades is evident in the proliferation of Wild Pigs from Tekong and Ubin to many parts of the main

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island. This is also evident in the increasing sightings of the nationally endangered species such as the Oriental Pied Hornbill, the Red Junglefowl and the Straw-headed Bulbul, which were all at one time restricted mainly to Ubin if sighted at all, but now recorded in many patches of forests on the main island. The Straw-headed Bulbul, listed in the IUCN Red List as vulnerable, is now evidently thriving in Singapore (Ho, 2000; Tan, 2001). For facilitating input of fresh blood from the north, the patches in the northern sector in areas such as Pulau Ubin, Pasir Ris, Lorong Halus, Khatib Bongsu, Ulu Sembawang, Woodlands, Kranji, the Western Catchment, etc are crucially important.

Concerning dispersal of forest species from the central Nature Reserves to the other forest patches in established parks, in particular those in the Southern Ridges like Mount Faber, Kent Ridge, Telok Blangah, etc, the forest patches along the Railway Corridor such as that along Clementi Road and Alexandra have great potential. For whatever forest wildlife (eg the Greater Coucal, Abbot's Babbler, etc) that still survives in these patches, the main way for rejuvenation is from the north as the Straits of Singapore is a formidable barrier to dispersal for forest species from Indonesia.

Moreover, these forests are also important serving as refuelling stations and havens for hosts of migratory birds such as the flycatchers, warblers, pittas, cuckoos, raptors etc seeking congenial climes during winter in the temperate zone. A very good example of this is at Bidadari, a suburban woodland in the former Muslim cemetery, which has a record of 53 migratory dryland bird species (in contra-distinction to the wetland species found at Sungei Buloh), which amounts to 55 percent of the national total (96) for such birds recorded in Singapore. Two of these migrants are in the IUCN Red List - the Japanese Paradise Flycatcher and the Brown-chested Jungle Flycatcher. The protection of such patches will be a significant contribution on the part of this small nation towards transboundary or transnational biodiversity conservation (NSS, 2012b).

Their Ecological Services for Humans

Irrespective of whether they harbour rich biodiversity or not, it must not be forgotten that they provide important ecological services that we, Singaporeans, tend to take for granted - such as carbon sequestration, flood control and cooling of ambient heat. The loss or reduction of these free services will make life here uncomfortable and more costly. That trees play a tremendous role in carbon sequestration is well-known to all concerned with the crisis of global warming. The recent unusual spate of flooding downtown under heavy rainfall with the concomitant financial losses to business is an apt reminder of what happens when

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woodlands have disappeared. The natural greenery that had been wiped out over the decades of development would have acted as sponge to the deluge, helping to reduce or slow down its runoff, lessening the excessive discharge into the existing monsoon drains and canals.

Concerning the role of forests in mitigating the so-called 'urban heat island effect' due to urbanisation, a recent study by Dr Matthias Roth, an atmospheric scientist, from NUS should be seriously taken into account (*The Straits Times*, 6 November 2012). According to Roth, Singapore's average night-time and day-time temperatures have increased significantly. What is of grave concern is that "greater urbanisation in downtown Singapore means that in the last 40 years, the difference in night-time temperatures between the city centre and the undeveloped areas has doubled …. Today, urban areas can be up to seven degree Celsius hotter at night than in rural areas such as Lim Chu Kang, compared to 40 years ago, when the difference was about 3.5 degree Celsius". With the increasing dependency day and night on artificial air conditioners, energy consumption and cost would escalate as Singapore clears more of its remaining forests and replaces them with a concrete jungle. According to Roth, simply "keeping trees here and there" may not help to mitigate the effect. What is needed are "medium-sized parks and nature areas".

Given this, it is of utmost importance to study the impact of the 'urban heat-island effect' and its consequent environmental and economic costs - under the scenario that all the existing greenery will be cleared for development, except the 10 percent set aside for the Nature Reserves and parks. Does it make any iota of sense to say that Singapore's development is sustainable when a massive proportion of the existing natural means of carbon sequestration is going to be destroyed and that as a consequence, will enlarge further this small nation's already gargantuan eco-footprint?

Nature Conservation for Singaporeans

More and more Singaporeans are coming to realise the value and importance of these wild or 'spontaneous' greenery in their daily lives. This is manifested in the recent escalation of protest against the projected development of condominium and housing estates right smack into them such as at Sungei Ulu Pandan, Bukit Brown, Pasir Ris, Dairy Farm, Tanah Merah, Bidadari and Punggol. The commitment and passion of these folks are expressed in formation of local committees, organised meetings and petition campaigns.

This is indeed a very refreshing new trend, given that in the past, those of such persuasion tend to rely on established Non-governmental Organisations (NGO) to launch such conservation campaigns. To view this trend simply as residents fighting to preserve the value of their

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home properties is a gross misperception, considering that the support given to the nature conservation cause at Bukit Brown and Bidadari comes from Singaporeans who are living outside these areas, which are degazetted graveyards. Even at Pasir Ris, the petition drive garnered a significant support from around the Housing & Development Board (HDB) heartland (Cherry Fong, Pasir Ris Greenbelt Committee, personal communication).

Voices are rising among the general population of Singapore other than the so-called greenies, saying that enough is enough, as they are seeing the tremendous erosion and disappearing of this wild greenery all over Singapore in the last few years and are beginning to feel the loss of values embedded in them like scenic landscapes and local green landmarks, free air conditioners, neighbourhood arenas for nature appreciation, etc, which they have taken for granted and suddenly threatened with extinction.

Concluding Remarks

What is pertinent now is that we should realise that talk of having a balance between nature conservation and economic development is simply meaningless because the balance had been devastatingly tilted against nature, with the modernisation of Singapore into a first-world nation. Only 1 percent of the original 13 percent of the mangrove forests are left, while for the original forests that were present when Stamford Raffles landed, less than 5 percent is left (mainly in the Nature Reserves). What we can talk meaningfully about is compensation for what has been lost. What we see now is some sort of recovery but of course this will not be allowed to run its full course given the government's plan for further economic growth and a population increase to six million or more. Conscientious planning, design, revamping and intensifying the use of old housing estates and brownfield areas should seriously be the way to go.

However, if development is to be at the expense of destroying all these remaining wild forests and greenery, leaving only 10 percent for nature reserves and parks, the sense of being at home for a significant proportion of Singaporeans, will be drastically diminished, I believe. For many nature lovers and conservationists, myself included, this sentiment turns into outrage when it is realised that these invaluable and lovely forests are ravaged for expensive condominiums while the many golf courses serving a minuscule proportion of the population remain intact.

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Maintaining Identity in Changing Landscapes

Singapore's City in a Garden: 50 Years of Greening

*By **Kenneth Er & Leong Chee Chiew***

Singapore's City in a Garden: 50 Years of Greening

Singapore - The Garden City

On 16 June 1963, former Prime Minister (PM) Lee Kuan Yew planted a *Cratoxylum formosum* at the Farrer Circus. This signified the launch of Singapore's greening programme, a sustained effort that has spanned the last 50 years. The tree-planting site at Farrer Circus has been replaced by road development which reflects the rapid rate of urban renewal and the challenge of balancing development with urban greening in Singapore. Despite this, Singapore is today recognised as a premier tropical garden city. The National Parks Board (NParks) maintains 1.4 million trees and 63 square kilometres of gardens, parks and nature reserves (equivalent to 9 percent of Singapore's land area of 700 square kilometres) that provide a verdant backdrop for leisure and recreation in a highly urbanised city. This is expanded further by a concerted effort to connect the greenery into a green landscape matrix that envelops the city-state, bringing forth the notion of a city in a garden. More than 200 kilometres of park connectors have been implemented, with a target of 300 kilometres to be completed by 2015.

Singapore's growth as a Garden City did not come by chance. As some would argue, this is a case of environmental possibilism[1] - where the Garden City is an engineered landscape and a product of 'Man's intervention in Nature'. It is the archetypal demonstration of the Singapore government's efficiency in planning and pragmatic approach in governance.

This paper reflects on the key success factors that have brought about the Garden City, and shares the optimism ahead as Singapore seeks to transform itself further from a Garden City into a City in a Garden.

Growing the Garden City

In 1992, the United Nations lauded Singapore for its green policies and integration of environmental concerns into development policies. In 2008, Dr Ahmed Djoghlaf, the then Executive Secretary of the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity, visited Singapore and was so pleased with Singapore's conservation model that he remarked to the local media, "I am extremely impressed by Singapore and never imagined that you would have such greenery and nature in the heart of one of the most populated cities in the world. Singapore is already going in the right direction but my plea is that the

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[1] Savage (1997) posits that Singapore's success as a Garden City hinges on environmental possibilism, which upholds the "view that humans, by virtue of their culture, intelligence, pragmatic philosophy, technology, organisational abilities, among other things, are active participants in human-nature relations. The possibilists thus see environment as setting opportunities and possibilities in which Man is the final arbiter and judge of its use."

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Rooftop Garden in public housing estate (Edgefield Plains)

experience you have accumulated, you share with the world and your neighbours." The success of the Garden City has come about because of several key factors, of which four are highlighted here.

Strong government commitment

When former PM Lee launched Singapore's greening programme in 1963, he saw this as both an economic and social imperative. The Garden City was a deliberate strategy to differentiate Singapore from other developing countries by turning the city into a tropical garden city with well-maintained greenery. He believed that this was the most cost-effective way to impress upon visiting dignitaries and investors of the commitment and efficiency of the government. He also felt that this was a good way to raise the morale of the people and gave them a sense of pride in their environment and in Singapore (Lee, 2000).

Former PM Lee did not just provide the vision but was personally involved in the greening of Singapore. This was best illustrated as Singapore prepared to host the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference in 1971. He directed the greening of the city-state by expediting the planting of roadside trees and shrubs, and providing a budget of $1.2 million for this. He also set up the Garden City Action Committee (GCAC) to plan, co-ordinate and implement greening measures to spruce up the city for the conference. The GCAC would continue thereafter to co-ordinate efforts amongst public sector agencies to transform Singapore into a Garden City. This was instrumental as the Garden City initiative would require a whole-of-government effort and silos across agencies had to be broken down for this to succeed. The report of the GCAC would be submitted monthly to him then. He would track the progress of the work and would also provide suggestions to the committee.

The successful transformation of Singapore into a Garden City in a relatively short period of time is attributed to the personal attention from the political leadership, as well as the ability of agencies to work across boundaries. Over the years, the government continues to emphasise the importance of greenery as providing a

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quality living environment amidst a growing population.

Greenery provision as part of national development

Singapore is probably one of the few countries where the government agency mandated to manage and develop its green assets resides within a Ministry that is responsible for infrastructure development and not the environment. There are good reasons for this and has, in fact contributed immensely to the development of the Garden City.

In the late 1960s, the Parks & Trees Unit was set up within the Roads Branch of the Public Works Department (PWD) in the Ministry of National Development (MND). This later became the Parks and Recreation Department (PRD), which was

merged under the NParks in 1996. The presence of the Parks & Trees Unit within the PWD allowed for the sustained effort in roadside tree planting and provided the much needed close co-ordination in the development of a road code which incorporated tree planting.

The transition from PRD to NParks marked a paradigm shift in the emphasis on the role of parks, gardens and greenery in Singapore. In the years leading to the formation of NParks, the development and management of green spaces was seen largely from the viewpoint of green infrastructure. NParks focused on the value propositions of parks, gardens, nature reserves and green spaces from the viewpoints of leisure lifestyle and social well-being of Singaporeans and residents. This shift in focus was greatly facilitated by the close working relationship between the NParks

Streetscape – Mandai Road

and Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA). Being in the same Ministry allowed for greater alignment of vision that the provision of green spaces for recreation and the safeguarding of our natural heritage were critical to making Singapore more distinctive and liveable. The Parks and Waterbodies Plan in 2001, which mapped out a vision for the next 40 to 50 years, is the result of that close working relationship. To the benefit of future generations, the Concept Plan aimed at doubling green spaces from the current 2,500 hectares to 4,500 hectares. This was further enhanced in Master Plan 2003, where an additional 1,200 hectares of green spaces and 120 kilometres of park connectors were set aside along with a total of 18 nature areas and four nature reserves reflected in land use plans. It is interesting to note that until the revision of the Parks and Trees Act in 2005, the provision of a green buffer in new residential and commercial developments was stipulated under URA's Planning Act.

Aside from centralising greenery provision within the ambit of the MND, there was a clear direction from the onset that greenery provision was integral to national infrastructure development. The Parks and Trees Act, which was enacted in Parliament in 1975, provided legislation that stipulated the provision of green verges along roadsides and the conservation of mature trees in the Tree Conservation Areas around Bukit Timah and Changi.

Continual professional development and innovation

Central to the sustained growth and maintenance of the Garden City was the strong pursuit of professional development and a culture of innovation. In the early years, research teams were sent overseas to source for fast-growing tropical trees that will green up the city. This was coupled by the greening of concrete structures such as retaining walls and flyovers, with an ivy-like creeper *Ficus pumilla*. Bougainvilleas were introduced so that they would cover the vehicular impact guardrails. Planting troughs were also creatively designed on overhead bridges, so that Bougainvilleas and other flowering climbers could adorn and soften these structures.

The spirit of professional development continues to prevail. The Centre for Urban Greenery and Ecology (CUGE) was established in 2007 to develop expertise in the industry and share knowledge on urban greenery and ecology. This filled a much-needed gap in the training of horticulturists and arborists within NParks and the industry. Standards were also set and benchmarked internationally. For example, the Certified Arborist Programme, a certification accredited with the International Society of Arboriculture, was introduced to ensure that the highest standards in tree care were maintained.

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In tandem with continual professional development, there is a constant search for new innovations to advance the Garden City. The following three examples illustrate this. As the greenery infrastructure was established, greater attention was paid to conserving biodiversity in the city (Ng, 2008). A concerted effort was made to not only restore our natural habitats within the nature reserves, but to ensure that the biodiversity within the reserves would persist over time. For this to succeed, it was necessary that animals and plants be allowed to disperse between insular habitat remnants. This ensures the exchange of genetic materials between populations and insures against extinctions due to the outbreak of diseases or natural forces such as wind and fire. The ongoing development of a 50-metre wide Ecolink to serve as a bridge for wildlife across the Bukit Timah Expressway, linking the Bukit Timah Nature Reserve and Central Catchment Nature Reserve, is one such strategy.

The Park Connector Network (PCN) was first conceived in the early 1990s to provide Singaporeans with additional recreational opportunities as well as to link fragmented nature conservation areas together to improve biodiversity. Making use of under-utilised spaces like drainage and road reserves to provide paths for cycling, jogging and rollerblading, 200 kilometres of PCN have been completed today, and will be expanded to 300 kilometres in 2015. As the network grew island-wide, so did its popularity as shown by a NParks survey that found that the number of visits increased from a mere 1 percent of surveyed population in 2006 to 26 percent in 2011 (Poon, 2013). By planting trees and shrubs that attracted animal life, surveys of various park connectors have also turned up rich birdlife as well as butterflies and dragonflies.

Progress of efforts to enhance urban biodiversity, such as by creating island-wide ecological corridors and habitats, is monitored using the Singapore Index on Cities' Biodiversity. Developed in collaboration with the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Singapore Index is currently being tested by 70 cities worldwide as a self-assessment tool for native biodiversity in the city, ecosystem services provided by biodiversity in the city and governance and management of biodiversity in the city.

Gardens by the Bay

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Yet another example of innovation is the newly opened Gardens by the Bay where the disciplines of architecture, landscape architecture, engineering, horticulture and applied botany were integrated to create unique vertical gardens on Supertrees and gardens within cooled glass houses that are powered by horticultural waste from the Garden City.

Long-standing partnership with community

The PRD and NParks have had a long association with the community, which have played many roles to help establish the Garden City. Community ownership for the Garden City is encouraged through several initiatives. In the mid 1980s, the PRD actively planted fruit trees in housing estates. The resident committees would look after the trees and harvest the fruits for distribution to the residents. This was labour-intensive and also brought about friction in the distribution of the fruits and was eventually ceased. Efforts to bring the community onboard the Garden City initiative was further revived when NParks launched the Community in Bloom programme in 2005. The objective was to inculcate a gardening culture in Singapore. Since its inception, more than 500 community gardens have been established in private and public residential estates, schools, hospitals and even office precincts. This has proven to be successful as people from all walks of life come together to form gardening interest groups and work together to beautify their community gardens. They are akin to self-help networks that share knowledge on horticulture and collaborate in the maintenance of their gardens. NParks merely provides guidance and advice (Longman, 2007).

In addition to creating a greater sense of ownership amongst the community for the Garden City, NParks has also

*Community
In Bloom*

been proactive in engaging the Non-government Organisations (NGOs) on nature conservation. At a time when engagement with NGOs was rare, NParks worked with the Nature Society (Singapore) (NSS) to conserve 85 hectares of mangrove wetlands at Sungei Buloh as a bird sanctuary in 1988. Sungei Buloh eventually became a nature reserve in 2000. More telling was when NSS submitted a petition on the proposed development of a golf course at Lower Pierce in 1992 resulting

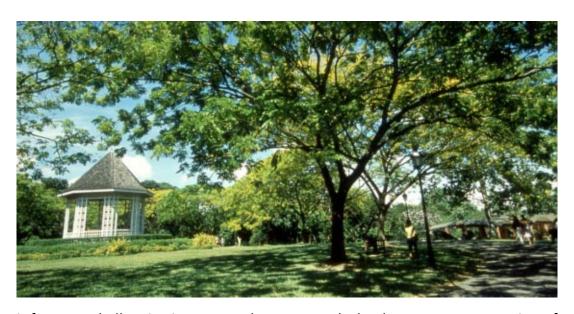*Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve*

in NParks managing to persuade Government to halt the project (Tan et al, 1995). Yet again in mid 2001, the NSS appealed for Chek Jawa, a 40-hectare intertidal area at Pulau Ubin that was about to be reclaimed, to be conserved. Following a detailed report of the biodiversity of the site by the NSS and the marine biologists from the National University of Singapore, a decision was made to defer the reclamation work for as long as Chek Jawa is not required for development.

From Garden City to City in a Garden

The future is one of optimism. In 2011, NParks unveiled plans to advance the Garden City to a City in a Garden. This was a vision first developed by the then Chief Executive Officer of NParks, Dr Kiat Tan, as early as 1996. More than just semantics, the vision comprises of three tenets: a verdant metropolis rising out of a pervasive landscape matrix of tropical greenery; a vibrant urban ecosystem thriving with biodiversity within a seamless network of streetscape greenery, parks, gardens, nature reserves and skyrise greenery; and a strong sense of community ownership within a quality living environment.

While this vision will build upon the foundations of the Garden City by intensifying streetscape greenery and developing destination parks with strong thematic identities, it will further advance the Garden City by focusing on the urban ecosystem. This

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is far more challenging in concept than merely beautifying the city with amenity plantings for shade and to soften the harshness of the urban environment. It moves the paradigm from biodiversity conservation within the Nature Reserves alone to conservation outside the Reserves. This will be achieved by the development of a more amenable landscape matrix through habitat restoration and enhancement within parks, park connectors and streetscape greenery. The focus on creating a sense of community ownership goes a step further beyond just community gardening. The energy and enthusiasm of the younger generation will be harnessed and brought to bear in the stewardship of our Nature Reserves and areas through the Community in Nature programme. In tandem with this effort to engage the community in co-creation, the development of a Round Island Route as an extension of the Park Connector Network seeks to connect not just parks, but communities. This will capture the imagination of Singaporeans and bring a nation of people of different generations together. Last but not least, the Singapore Botanic Gardens, a rich repository of botanical discoveries in this part of the world and a bastion of heritage and shared memories amongst Singaporeans, will continue to be enhanced as a world-class botanical institution.

The City in a Garden vision will take time to develop. Like the Garden City that we know of today, it will strengthen the identity of the Singapore landscape and make our small city-state truly unique.

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Maintaining Identity in Changing Landscapes

How Singapore can Transform Itself into a Creative Centre in the Region

*By **Tay Kheng Soon***

How Singapore can Transform Itself into a Creative Centre in the Region

Everything that happens in the world affects Singapore. When the big powers sneeze, we get a cold. Singapore is a third-world orphan that refused to be put down so its only way was up and so it succeeded under the umbrella of its Western stepparents. However, Singapore's will to succeed was based on its own vision and discipline. But that discipline had a cost. The cost was the decline in authentic identity, lack of self-confidence and low on creativity. Initial creativity gave way to reliance on the best of others but not its own. While success brought pride, that pride was brittle; easy to take umbrage. Taken together, these put the brakes on stepping out of the box.

This piece of fiction is an imagination of how Singapore might find the courage to be creative all over again. This time, it is not the 60s sort of dire necessity that drove it but necessity of a different kind; it is an internal necessity to survive by becoming herself in a much changed world. How did this need arise? Usually at mid-life, people think again. Singapore is experiencing its own mid-life crisis but a crisis is always both a challenge and an opportunity. How Singapore will remake itself was the challenge. How it built on its strengths was its opportunity and some things in the world could be bought cheap.

As I write this piece, I imagine it backwards from the vantage point of

2022 - how the new imperatives to transform ourselves came about. Strangely, it began in the heart and in the heartlands. The need to re-integrate head, heart and hand was long awaited….life felt incomplete in the fragmented state.

The spark came about by a mindset change among a disenchanted bunch of bright young civil-servants and their counterparts outside. Returned scholars who had breathed a freer sort of air felt the atmosphere stifling. So they fretted, fearful at first to challenge the established views but by degrees, raised innocent but probing questions with prickly humour. This set off a chain of actions and reactions that led to rapped knuckles and red faces. It would have been left there but the rediscovery of lost threads in their own history and culture expunged from their consciousness brought an added sense of purpose and self-identity. Life after that seemed short-changed.

Singapore's illiberal democracy had succeeded but it raised a feckless people and this disturbed members of the new thinking elite to no end. The stage was set for change….

Singapore in 2022

After the 2016 General Elections (GE), the ruling party saw more losses despite having courted the electorate for the past five years. The People's Action Party (PAP) had lost a Group Representation

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Constituency (GRC) in the 2011 GE; this time they lost several Single Member Constituencies. It was a new phenomenon indeed. Several Independents emerged victorious. It was a signal of the change in the polity; a rise of conscience politics; no ideology, no party, just individuals wanting change.

Something fundamental had happened in Singapore. Singaporeans wanted more heart and less dread. This GE led to another crisis in government. Government and Party were till then seen as one and the same but now, both split internally and between them, top civil servants were openly challenged by younger members. News filtered out from behind the closed doors. The ultra-conservative cabinet ministers were also challenged by ambitious young leaders. The time, it seemed, had come for the new in both the civil service and in the Party.

The New Singapore Plan

After the 2016 GE, a new-look civil service eager to implement new ideas adopted a plan which had gathered dust since 2013 on how to turn Singapore smart at the grassroots level while accommodating a large influx of smart foreigners without stressing out the existing living environment of Singapore. The proposal was for a large area on the South Coast of the Island stretching from Pandan Reservoir which included the National University of Singapore (NUS) all

the way to East Coast Parkway to house at least a million new people and became the high-tech creative centre of the new Singapore. This 23-kilometre belt was started in 2017 and progressively became the workplace, waterfront residential zone and playground of the super smart and super creative. This became the new creative heart of Singapore and it attracted foreigners mixed in with smart locals and talent from all over the world including Asia. The brightest and the best from everywhere came here to work, live, learn, play, farm and heal, and it became the cradle and incubator of Asia's new ideas, new products and new enterprises. All came, attracted by the sheer vibrancy of it all.

New Planning Methodology

The new planning ideas came about because of a new planning methodology called 3D planning. The mismatch between new ideas and old planning methods was finally resolved. The old method was based on the matching of demographics to land use. These projections were based on existing building and occupancy typologies and building norms. Based on these, infrastructure, roads, water and electricity were allocated. This methodology was taught in all planning schools in the West and applied everywhere. They were premised on large land masses but were not appropriate for small places like Singapore. This led to mistaken notions

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of land shortage as there was a great deal of slippage in the floor area outcomes. Inherent errors occurred because floor space ratios were not computed island-wide and re-allocated appropriately.

Innovation in building design accelerated thereafter. The stagnation in design ended. The architectural profession had a lot of new thinking to do. Stacking, weaving, clustering, mixing and so on were found to be capable of optimising land usage while being consistent with livability and synergetic criteria. Accordingly, this new methodology opened up many new possibilities in social design, physical planning and innovative architectural design beyond style.

Maintaining Social Cohesion

At such a rate of change in Singapore, there were two widening gaps - the income gap and the knowledge gap. Both threatened to tear the cohesion apart. Without trust, the much-needed disruptive changes would be held back by negative social sentiments.

Addressing the Income Gap

While voluntary reductions of Ministers' pay made an impression, it was the raising of minimum wage at the lowest wage level that helped mollify the negative sentiments. A whole slew of cost-cutting measures after the 2016

GE became necessary and a more equitable situation was created for a while. New values needed to be fostered. Democratising the social space, meaningful work, better family and community life, more involved participation, enlightenment, identity, better education - all these required a different approach than the carrot and stick method. Incentivisation which is external had to shift to internal motivation. The Maslowian hierarchy had changed in the advent of the information culture. As people know more, they demand dignity and self-actualisation at every stage of the ladder of needs they happen to be at. Governments are compelled to match up to this new situation.

Addressing the Knowledge Gap

The digital divide was overcome but the vision gap was more difficult. If nothing was done to address this gap, there will be trouble. This gap was in the heartlands – the Housing & Development Board (HDB) estates. While education had always been a priority thanks to the schools, the expansion of the polytechnics and the Institutes of Technical Educations (ITE), the setting up of many more universities and trans-location of many foreign branch campuses to Singapore, raising the general knowledge of ordinary Singaporeans lagged behind. This was the urgent task but few had any ideas how to do so. Some new

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ideas were thrown up in the 'National Conversations' in 2012.

Inserting Smart Webs into HDB Estates

There was only so much that management, education and incentives could do. A change in the hearts and minds of the masses had to happen. The problem was how? This is where the idea of Smart Webs got dusted off and was implemented.

Density there is, but what was missing was synergy. The Smart Webs did the trick. There was first the need to shift from the prevailing mechanistic way of seeing things, to the more complex biological way. Richard Florida's call for bohemian culture which only resulted in bartop dancing being allowed, had to go much further.

Inserting a Central Nervous System (CNS) into HDB Estates

In the biological imagination, a housing estate began to be thought of as a living organism and not as an efficient mechanism only. As such, the planners, architects and policy makers realised that what was needed was to emulate how high-functioning organisms work. The human system was the most complex. Realising this, the planners, architects and policy makers, backed by the community, began to plan and implement the link up of all the commercial, educational, artistic,

financial, sports and civil-society facilities into one large interlinked network. The effect was literally electricfying! As this took place over the past 10 years, a new lease of life burst forth and a vibrant creativity became evident. The hitherto placid and *kiasu* mentality gave way to more expressive and entrepreneurial behaviour.

People, as they went about their daily routines, found themselves enjoying the liveliness of the Smart Webs. They naturally imbibed through chance encounters with neighbours and new friends with new ideas. This is what high signal density and high signal diversity means as found in high-functioning organisms and successful cities. These are the natural results derived from having a well-endowed nervous system: Sidewalk cafes, street art, school students, parents, teachers, office workers, artists, designers, research labs, prototyping workshops, performance theatres, adult education studios and the like mixed in with coffee shops, street stalls, groceries, restaurants and so on. The interaction between retail commerce, social clubs, civic activities, educational provisions, humanitarian institutions and galleries all combine to produce a wonderful experience, everyday, for everyone.

Bukit Brown and the Rise of an Authentic Singaporean Identity

The popular movement to save the Bukit

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Brown Cemetery turned up many stories of long gone social heroes; heroes who made a difference in helping their fellow man. Sentimentality and nostalgia turned into self-discovery and thus authentic identity. As the stories of the lives and deeds of long ago Singaporean heroes circulated through the social media, a new self-appreciation began to form. These raised the level of self-respect and an authentic self-confidence among Singaporeans laid the foundation for the new Singapore they wished to come about. This was a new politics. They thus began to see themselves no longer as nucleated individuals driven by the economic imperatives of separated lives but began to see themselves as a self-respecting community with respectable values and community spiritedness. To the extent that government failed to see this was the extent to which they were seen to have lost touch. And so, there was a shift in outlook which contributed to the tide of change that was gathering momentum since the 2011 GE. Government was hard pressed to respond. It did not know quite how.

NTUC Leadership New Role in Fostering Co-operative Enterprises in Singapore

Other organs of the state were also stirring beneath. Meanwhile, some sections of the National Trades Union Congress (NTUC) were restive. These lower minions in NTUC who implemented the nuts and bolts of the successful enterprises - the taxi business, the supermarket and insurance businesses wanted to pioneer new areas of enterprise. The NTUC's huge capital resources fuelled the new ambitions. The grassroots sections of NTUC began to hear about the very successful co-operative movements in other countries, notably in Mondragon in the Basque Country of Northern Spain. The NTUC decided to send a study team to see for themselves what was happening there.

Learning from the Mondragon Experiment

The NTUC delegates were greatly surprised and inspired when they saw the Mondragon Experiment. Mondragon is a fiercely independent culture; they were very self-reliant. From very poor circumstances after World War II, they built up a series of very successful co-operatives.

Started in 1956 from humble beginnings, Mondragon is today the largest and most successful co-operative enterprise in Europe. It has a 100,000-strong workforce in 27 worker-owned and operated co-operative enterprises. The worker-owners hire and fire their managers evaluating them at annual General Assemblies. They have their own bank, supermarket network which has expanded into Spain and Europe, their

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own university, research labs and schools for their children. They have their own pension scheme and share profits according to a point system which they decide for themselves. They provide jobs for life for their members. Changes in economic prospects do not result in layoffs but in redeployment to other co-operatives and/or assignment to skills re-education courses that lead to subsequent reassignment. Relocation costs are borne by the central co-operative. Too good to be true, economists who came to evaluate and measure their output efficiency are astounded that theirs is much higher than that of comparable propriety enterprises elsewhere. Productivity is higher per worker because they work happy. Asked if they were communists, their reply is that they are not ideological but are just being practical. They have shown that they can function in the capitalist environment of Spain and the European Union (EU). An American team from the United Steelworkers union studied the Mondragon Model and tried to adapt it to the United States of America (USA) with some success.

Revamped Educational Institutions

It has been long realised that creative intelligence, diligence and resolute application are the keys to Singapore's success, hence the emphasis on education from the beginning. These took the forms of compulsory schooling, a multi-track path through ITEs, polytechnics and finally to the universities in a vast integrated network that served Singapore well in its time. As new challenges emerged in the wake of the global slowdown, a twist in the system became necessary.

Manpower planning and education was always integrated. When the manpower planners re-did their labour force projections, they began to take into account a 600,000 potential Singaporean workforce which was hitherto left out in their calculations. They found that if there was a change in the education system by introducing the German work/study system into schools and even in higher education, this would liberate many 16 to 24-year olds into the workforce productively. Moreover, if spatially schools and training institutions were reconceived and disaggregated and located into the new HDB Smart Webs, there would be multiple advantages in efficiency and knowledge acquisition. Finally, if the National Service military stint was shortened to one and a half years with the balance of one year devoted to working for points which count towards Co-curricular Activity (CCA) credits required in higher education and in the enrichment of job *curricula vitae*, there would be a significant boost to the needed workforce with the added advantage in students having work experience and matured sense of realism as well.

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Character Education

In line with these moves, school education also got a boost in its drive toward including character development. Hitherto character education was hard to fit into the largely book-based learning system and refocusing this way meant character development became the core curriculum. Education thus became holistic through the introduction of the new 5Cs - Courage, Curiosity, Creativity, Compassion and Collaborative ability and these values replaced the old materialistic and selfish 5Cs which were previously touted as Cash, Condo, Credit Card, Country Club and Car. A much deeper level of personal and community motivation came about.

The boost to education was through recruiting suitable teachers from all over the world in addition to talented and passionate locals into our schools and universities, the polytechnics and the ITEs as well. At last, this was the new foundation put in place after years of tweaking the education system.

Changes in the Civil Service

A major transformation that led to the 'new' civil service and 'new' government came into existence after the 2016 GE. In line with the revamping of the physical space of Singapore through the 'Southern Intensification' and the insertion of Smart Webs into all HDB estates, the changes in the educational institutions including the People's Association and community centres also underwent radical review. Community centres ceased to be a point location but became a 'network Community Centre System'. Schools and ITEs also became 'distributed learning webs' integrated into the HDB Smart Webs.

Unlike the 'hub and spoke' concept within the old mechanical model, schools were no longer seen as a centralised cluster of facilities but as a web of classrooms, laboratories, halls, lecture theatres and libraries meshed into the communities they serve. Inserted into the larger intelligent HDB webs they contributed to it and benefitted from it as well. There was much synergy and economy achieved through co-location. For example, school canteens could either be open to the public or food could be obtained from nearby food centres to mutual benefit. These are some of the obvious synergies obtained along with many other activities such as with sports, in the arts and the use of classrooms by the community. Empty classrooms would serve for adult education in the evenings, holidays and weekends, and so would the empty assembly halls and the likes.

Ageing in Place with Dignity and Purpose

Those aged from 55 to 75 years old who were previously regarded as marginal to the workforce found new life.

How Singapore can Transform Itself into a Creative Centre in the Region

Through job redesign and co-locating jobs within the Smart Webs in HDB estates, retirees found satisfying jobs close to where they live. They also received special skills training in the Smart Web, rubbing shoulders with school-going kids and being in the heart of things. Rather than languishing in the assigned old folks' corners, they found dignity and livelihood in many new occupations – tending to organic vegetable and herb farms in the public spaces, in jobs found in the decentralised healthcare facilities, supervising the local traffic, running local community micro-credit banks, providing cultural and educational inputs through their accounts of time past to school children, running the local libraries, managing the post offices, food centres and so on. The retirees want to be useful and thus respected, and they want to live near to their friends and family. These can all be achieved in and near the Smart Webs.

Survivability and Creativity

These are twin concepts. The scope for the Singapore economy in the tough times is to be expected and best served by smart people. The timely implementation of the Smart Web in the HDB estates combined with the work or study character development education system at all levels of learning has put Singapore in good stead for the uncertain future that it certainly has to face. 2022 was no different from 2012 in that sense. The uncertainties and the vulnerability of Singapore are a constant. Survivability of Singapore cannot but be premised on its total intelligence. This is what was achieved in the 10 years from 2012 to 2022.

All these changes were added into the Smart Webs in the HDB estates. ITE Version 2, Polytechnics Version 2, Schools Version 2, Community Centres Version 2 were all spread along the Smart Webs and together with commercial and other facilities created the pedagogical environment.

Together with the Southern Intensification, pressure on the rest of the island abated. The population stabilised at 6.5 million and the transformation of the HDB estates with the insertion of Smart Webs raised the entire level of intelligence of the population. They were also happier. The total fertility rate began to rise even as the ageing population climbed. Singapore having survived the global financial crisis also became the new creative centre of Asia......

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About the Author

Tay Kheng Soon is a practicing architect and adjunct Professor at NUS School of Architecture. He is a recipient of the Singapore Institute of Architects Gold Medal for lifelong contribution to architecture and the profession. He is developing, at Kampung Temasek in Johore, 'the school of doing' to provide Singapore students and teachers actualised learning and cultivate love of nature.

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