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Within & without: Singapore in the world; the world in Singapore

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Citation

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SINGAPORE IN THE WORLD; THE WORLD IN SINGAPORE

Edited by
Pang Eng Fong & Arnoud De Meyer

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FOREWORD

2015 was an important year for Singapore Management University. It was our 15th anniversary; but, far more importantly, it was Singapore's 50th anniversary as an independent nation. Pang Eng Fong and I thought that this was a great occasion to bring foreign and Singaporean students together to learn more about how Singapore and the world around it have interacted with each. It was an opportunity to examine what and how Singapore has learned from the world, but also to reflect on how Singapore has contributed to the world, how it has influenced the world.

The format of the course was relatively simple: we invited guest speakers, for example, current or former ambassadors, academics and practitioners who could throw light on the interactions between Singapore and close or more distant countries and brought together a balanced group of overseas and Singaporean students and asked them to think, work and write together on a wide variety of issues. But the implementation entailed a bit more uncertainty: would students open up to each other, would they be prepared to challenge each others' beliefs, values and cultural norms?

The students lived up to the expectations. They challenged the speakers with their questions and reflections, engaged with each other on sensitive topics and learned that we all can learn from each other. Current events, for instance the terrorist attacks in France on Charlie Hebdo or the Rohingya refugee crisis in Southeast Asia definitely influenced the discussions. And students did not shy away from thorough discussions on capital punishment, national service or identity. But we also discussed more light-hearted topics, for example, food,

fashion, and youth culture. Pang Eng Fong is a Singaporean with an extensive international experience as a former ambassador in Europe; I am a European who did not know where or what Singapore was when I graduated from university, but who has developed a deep commitment to the country over the last 30 years. We are to some extent, the embodiment of Singapore in the world, the world in Singapore.

The essays in this book are by nature, very diverse in topics, of varying quality and approach. But they reflect the characteristics of this course: no topic is too sensitive to address if one has the willingness to listen to different sides of the story; nobody has full information or all the answers and thus we need to collaborate; and out of the clash of ideas the truth can emerge if one is willing to listen to the other. Like the students, I learned a lot about path dependencies and how current situations are anchored in century-long evolutions of the relationships between countries. I also got a better insight into how my own biases in interpreting current events, are rooted in my value system and cultural antecedents.

I hope that by reading some of the essays in this book you will discover some of these insights as well.

Arnoud De Meyer
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INTRODUCTION

The essays in this volume were written for a course on 'Singapore in the World; the World in Singapore' that we taught in the second term of the academic year 2014-15 in Singapore Management University (SMU). We developed the course as we felt it would be useful for both local and exchange students to learn more about Singapore – how it has evolved, especially in the past half century, how the island-state sees itself in the region and the world, and how the world contributes to its development. The course attracted a diverse group of 63 students; 33 of them were on exchange from universities in Asia, Europe and the Americas; the other 30 were drawn from five of the six schools in SMU. It required every student to write three papers – one on their own, a second with a partner from a different school or university and a third as part of a group of four to five. In all, about 100 essays were submitted, of which about a third were selected for this book. In choosing them, our aim was to ensure a diversity of topics and viewpoints that reflect the broad objective of the course, which is to enable students to gain a deeper understanding of an improbable nation that faces exceptional challenges as well as constraints.

As part of the course, we invited diplomats, senior civil servants and public intellectuals – their names and titles are in the Acknowledgements – to share their insights and perceptions of Singapore on the regional and world stage. Their talks sparked lively exchanges on many subjects that ranged beyond Singapore and its recent history.

We have organised the mostly short essays under two broad headings: Identity and Diversity. To be sure, there are other ways of grouping the essays. As students picked their own topics and did not write on set themes for a planned volume,

the book comprises an eclectic mix of essays. A reader familiar with Singapore may find the range of topics reflected in the essays narrow and unrepresentative. For example, under Identity, there are no essays on the main ethnic groups or nationalities in Singapore. In what follows, we draw attention to points made in a small sample of essays.

Essays in the first part of the book explore different dimensions of identity – national as well as social, cultural and linguistic. Identity is a complex, even slippery concept, shaped by history, culture and imagination. It can be construed positively as values and attitudes shared by a group. Just as often and perhaps more easily, it can be looked at as the absence of certain traits in the country. A distinctive national identity can become a stereotype, a convenient shorthand that is not necessarily derogatory. Thus nation A can be stereotyped as a proud country with helpful people who talk fast and gesticulate a lot; nation B as one with hardworking, frugal people who are sticklers for rules and regulations; and nation C as one with people who are reserved and indirect, and have tidy habits.

The opening essay, 'We, the Citizens of Singapore ' addresses the issue of national identity, an issue that is especially pertinent in 2015 as Singapore celebrates the 50th year of its independence as a new nation – a status it neither sought nor foresaw. The authors ask the question: what does the Singaporean identity stand for? They suggest that the answer must be historically grounded if it is to be a complete and honest one.

The essay 'Building Cross-cultural Bridges', uses data from the Hofstede Centre to describe the national character of five countries – Germany, India, Italy, the Netherlands, and Singapore – along five dimensions, namely, societal acceptance of inequality, degree of risk aversion, strength of the individualist/collectivist ethic, "masculinity versus femininity" and long-term

orientation. The authors find that, by and large, the findings of the Hofstede Centre accord with their perceptions of the society where they grew up. But they point out that they hold some values that are different from those ascribed to their countries. They also note that their different working styles are, in part, a reflection of their national character and that greater cross-cultural understanding would contribute to more productive interactions in the workplace.

The way a country celebrates its birth provides clues to it national character. In 'Birth of a Nation', the authors look at national celebrations in five countries, namely, France, Canada, Finland, USA and Singapore and find that despite differences in the manner of their birth, they serve a common purpose which is to bind the people to the nation and what it stands for.

Peaceful or traumatic, a country's birth may not be the most powerful force shaping its national identity. That identity could evolve with the country's developmental progress. In 'Faces and Facets of Singapore', the authors analyse the garden-city image of efficiency and cleanliness that Singapore projects onto the world stage, an image that has helped the city-state to attract foreign companies as well as talented people looking for a secure, cosmopolitan city to work and live in. Singapore's squeaky-clean image also lends itself to easy stereotyping abroad as the essay, 'Singapore: The Country Where You Cannot Chew Gum?', makes clear.

A national identity evolves and reflects a country's values and culture. It could be shaped by deliberate efforts to project a certain image to the world. If a nation is an "imagined community", imagination may be crucial to forging a new identity. The paper, 'Missing the Forest for the (Super) Trees', suggests that such an identity, "artificial" though it may be, can be positive and inspiring in its own way.

For many countries, food is a vital part of their national culture and identity. Singapore is no exception. Its national preoccupation, even obsession, with food – a diversity of cuisines reflecting its multi-ethnic population – sets it apart from many countries. The essay, 'The Singapore Palate' goes so far as to ask whether Singaporeans are defined by what they eat. Such is their craving for Singapore dishes. Yet, oddly, as the essay 'The Singapore in Singapore Noodles' notes, Singapore is known to many people outside Singapore for a dish not "created" in Singapore and which few Singaporeans are familiar with.

If the splendid variety of food has helped shape Singapore's national identity, so does Singlish, a uniquely Singaporean spoken tongue. Singlish baffles many foreigners, even some locals, as the essay 'English, Singlish and Feelings about Home' observes. But it also lets Singaporeans abroad recognise each other quickly and evoke warm feelings of home.

As a multicultural country with three ethnic groups and many different communities within each group, Singapore society is extraordinarily complex. If one adds to the three main groups, the many foreign communities made up of people from Asia, Europe, North America and other places, Singapore can rightly claim to be a cosmopolitan city. But only a brash person would say she sees the world in Singapore whole and feels at one with all its parts.

The last three essays in the first part of the book focus on three fairly small communities – Gurkhas, Peranakans and Armenians – all with distinct identities and a history that goes back to colonial Singapore. The three communities face different challenges. The essay 'The Gurkhas: Getting Ahead Abroad' draws attention to the plight of Gurkha family members who have lived for long periods in Singapore but are not allowed to remain and seek work in Singapore. In contrast,

new arrivals from Armenia have found work in Singapore and are helping to revitalise the once shrinking Armenian community. The essay 'Perennially Peranakan?' asks whether the revival of interest in Peranakan culture following the hit TV series *The Little Nyonya* is sustainable. It suggests that as Peranakan food is appreciated by Singaporeans and everyone, even non-Peranakans, can have a stake in sustaining and reinventing this (Peranakan) identity".

Essays in the second part of the book are grouped under the heading, Diversity. They cover diverse issues ranging from freedom of speech, education, meritocracy, drug laws, home ownership, casinos and martial arts. Several essays address big issues that will continue to be debated in Singapore for years to come. They include 'Will Singapore Ever be Ready for Charlie Hebdo?', 'Meritocracy, Inequality, and the Global War for Talent', 'Treating Drugs Softly?', 'VIP Orchids and Soft Power', 'Taking Creativity Seriously', and 'Marching and Giving Back'. Other essays have a narrower focus like those on politeness ('Who's Polite in Today's World?'), mixed martial arts ('Fighting in the Little Red Dot'), football referees ('Men in Black: Singaporeans at the World Cup'), Catalan food ('How Catalan Cuisine Came to Our Shore') and indie businesses ('The Spirit of Enterprise and Indie Businesses').

Essays in this book deal mostly with issues internal to Singapore – the *Within* dimension in the book title. When we run the course again and put together another volume of student essays, we hope for more essays on Singapore's role in the region and the world – the *Without* dimension.

PART 1

IDENTITY

We, the Citizens of Singapore

Priscilla Chia

Trenton James Riggs

Introduction

A s we approach the 50th year of our nationhood, the question of national identity has come into sharp focus. The concept of a "nation", like the expression "national identity", is a social construct created to unite individuals within the same geographical boundaries. Benedict Anderson describes a nation as an imagined political community because its members would never have the chance to know all their fellow members, yet in the minds of each, lives the image of their communion.

The Evolving Singapore Identity

Singapore is an accidental nation. In the words of our founding Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, "We were made a state, and then had to artificially create a nation." Against a backdrop of vulnerability and uncertainty, national identity became an important national building tool for uniting the nation in the face of adversity. A national identity that emphasises pragmatic values such as economic survival and meritocracy was created. National identity therefore wielded an important ideological and normative driving force in our formative years.

Our national identity has evolved, but the element of vulnerability remains. Worried that the growing influence of western values might dilute our "Asian identity", Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong mooted the idea of the need for shared values to reinforce our national and Asian identity, an initiative that culminated in the *1991 White Paper on Singapore's Shared Values*. One might recall the "Asian values" debate that took place subsequently.

Fast forward to today: the Singapore identity has taken on a more global outlook. This change was precipitated by the need to remain relevant in a globalised era and to strengthen our presence on the global stage. The Singapore identity has thus evolved in response to potential threats to our existence.

Clash over Values

To a large degree, and for a long time, the task of defining the "national identity" has been left to the government. Only in recent years have Singaporeans begun to assert their sense of national identity. They are questioning whether values such as economic pragmatism and meritocracy should continue to be given priority over values such as equality, social welfare and democratic freedom. This different perspective is not only about our identity, but also about the Singapore we want to be.

A manifestation of the clash over values can be gleaned in the debate on the *2013 Population White Paper,* which projects a Singapore population of 6.9 million by 2030. Many Singaporeans, already concerned with the liberal immigration policy, are worried about the longer-term social and economic impact of a much larger population. There is a palpable sense that the large influx of foreigners in recent years is threatening our common sense of identity and uniquely Singaporean values. The challenge lies in articulating what these shared values are.

Los Angeles, a city similar to us in size and global outlook, provides an interesting contrast. Like Singapore, it is home to many races, cultures, and nationalities – a mix that makes the city vibrant, creative and unlike any other. Historically, Los Angeles has received many waves of migrants and newcomers,

making it a melting pot of cultures. Its confidence in embracing new people should give us something to reflect on. While not downplaying the anxieties, we wonder whether the growing antipathy towards foreigners might be emblematic of a larger problem – our lack of confidence in ourselves.

But we Singaporeans are a unique and self-contradictory lot. Should we temper our global vision and give more support to local home-grown talent? Local artist Kit Chan, writing in a commentary for *Today* is spot on in pointing out that "Home surely starts with what is made in Singapore." As she puts it so eloquently, "If we do not develop our own writers, musicians, actors, poets, performers, architects, athletes, fashion designers, chefs, et cetera, then who will tell our stories, and express our hopes and dreams, grief and disappointments?"

So … What does it Mean when We Recite "We, the Citizens of Singapore"?

Going back to the question at the heart of it all – what exactly is the Singapore identity? This question elicits differing responses depending on whom you ask.

Interestingly, how we perceive ourselves might be different from how a non-Singaporean perceives us to be. A recent conversation with an American on an exchange programme in Singapore made this clear. To him, the Singaporean identity may be described as one that takes great pride in order and stability. Interesting also was his characterisation of Singaporeans as robotic. When the question was posed to a Singaporean, the immediate response was "hungrygowhere.com". What he meant to say was that local food is ingrained and central to the Singaporean identity. Many would point to Singlish as another important marker of the Singaporean identity.

Please do not get us wrong. Singaporeans love *chai tao kway*, *mee siam* and *rojak*. But surely the Singapore identity must be more than Singlish and local food.

The question of identity is a complex one. Our identity is never static and is always responding to the socio-political developments of the day. There are, of course, no easy answers. But one thing is clear: a re-visiting of our history books is necessary to answer this question of identity. After all, the Singapore we know today is intricately shaped by its past.

Admittedly, this is going to be difficult and uncomfortable because it forces us to confront, honestly and frankly, the many imperfections and mistakes, and difficult historical events such as Operation Coldstore and Operation Spectrum, the full stories of which are still not known.

Yet, without a grounded and truthful sense of our past, there can be no lasting foundation to anchor the Singapore identity. Without a deeper appreciation and understanding of our history, the soul searching for the Singapore identity cannot, and will not, be a complete and honest one.

Birth of a Nation: Ways of Celebrating

Celine Alexandra Fogde

Diana Khanh Nguyen

Paul Antoine Victor

Shu Chong Chen

Teo Yi Heng

Introduction

Although the word "nation" is often used interchangeably with the word "state" in normal parlance, there is a distinct difference between the two. While the word "state" refers to "the totality of a country's governmental institutions and officials, guided by the laws and procedures that structure their activities", the word "nation" is much more ambiguous. According to Joseph Klesner (2014), a nation can be described as "a group of people whose members share a common identity on the basis of distinguishing characteristics and a claim to a territorial homeland". Benedict Anderson goes further, characterising a nation an "imagined political community" as "the members of even the smallest nations will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them or even hear of them. Yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (Anderson, 1991).

Regardless of the definition adopted, a strong emphasis is placed on kinship among members of a given nation. This is why a nation's national day is important as it serves to bind a nation together. It not only celebrates the birth of a nation, but also reaffirms its core values.

There are many nations in the world, both past and present, and each is unique in its conception. Some fought their way to independence through bloody revolution while for others it was a more sedate affair. This essay compares the national days of five nations.

France

France's national day, which takes place on 14th July celebrates the French Revolution in 1789.

In 1788, after great famines, the French parliamentary system, ruled till then by the aristocracy and the clergy, was reformed to include the "*tiers état*", the common man. In June 1789, this "*tiers état*" proclaimed itself to be the French Assembly, taking power and creating a new constitution. The king was forced to accept this change and France became a constitutional monarchy. However, on 14 July, the people of Paris, led by the bourgeoisie, stormed the Bastille, a symbol of royal power. The revolutionaries freed the criminals imprisoned there, killed the director of the Bastille and carried his head around Paris on a spike.

This revolution led to several years of authoritarian rule and much bloodshed, especially during the Great Terror that followed. Indeed, during that time, the government suppressed most freedoms and France did not get a truly democratic system until the 1860s.

As such, it might be surprising to some that France has chosen 14th of July, the anniversary of such senseless violence and bloodshed, to be its national day: the day on which the French proudly proclaim their national motto – "*Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité*" (Freedom, Equality, Fraternity).

The reason for the choice of 14 July may lie in the manner in which history is taught in French schools. School children are taught that the French Revolution was a historic event that freed the French people. Great emphasis is given to the "*Declaration des Droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen*", which proclaimed that everybody is born equal and free. While the atrocities committed at that time were not completely whitewashed, teachers prefer to highlight the values that motivated them, even though they were used to rationalise heinous crimes.

Indeed, some may be of the opinion that the French have a tendency of glorifying their past achievements while

forgetting the darker aspects of history. For example, the French are proud of their involvement during the American Revolution, when French philosophers like Beaumarchais inspired American leaders with their views on the Enlightenment, views that are reflected in the American constitution. In fact, Beaumarchais was sent to the US by Louis the XVth for a selfish reason – to provide weapons to the Americans and so weaken the British while providing money to the French crown. Another example is the idolisation of Napoleon. While he was indeed a great leader who modernised France, many gloss over the "crimes" that he committed, such as his scorched earth strategies, the removal of the freedom of speech and assembly as well as the assassination of political opponents. The national anthem of France calls on the French people to oppose the impure blood of their enemies, which, at the time it was composed, referred to the Germans.

But that is the past; the French National Day is today a celebration of the values of freedom, peace, and equality. It provides a fascinating example of how the violent origin of a nation's birth can inspire positive values that continue to shape France today.

Canada

The 1st of July is Canada's national day, a federal statutory holiday. It celebrates the country's confederation in 1867, with three North American colonies: New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and the Province of Canada (later split into Ontario and Quebec) joining together to form the federation. Canada's border underwent many changes in the next half century, with six other provinces joining the federation. The concept of a national holiday (Dominion Day) was mooted in 1868 by the first

governor general of Canada, Viscount Monck, who called on Canadians to celebrate the anniversary of Confederation.

In the first 50 years after Confederation, Dominion Day celebrations were usually small in scale, organised by community groups and municipalities in the form of neighbourhood picnics and firework displays, and so on. It was not until the year 1927, after World War I that the first federally organised observance of the anniversary of Confederation took place, and was broadcast on coast-to-coast national radio. It was not until the 1950s that the federal government of Canada began to use the anniversary to promote unity and foster a sense of national identity among its citizens.

The first television broadcast of Canada's national day celebration took place on 1 July, 1958 on Parliament Hill in Ottawa, Canada. This date was more than just a starting point for a state-celebrated national day. It marked a shift in the political perception of Canada's national identity and organised efforts to ensure that citizens understood what it meant to be a Canadian. Previous national day celebrations had limited representation of the aboriginals and other minorities, French-speaking Canadians did not care much for the emphasis given to Canada as a dominion of the British Empire.

During the post-war years, the federal government saw the national holiday as a vehicle to bring minority groups into mainstream, white-centric culture. Ethnic groups were encouraged to represent and celebrate their own origin at the national celebration. Later on, the national day celebration was taken up a notch, moving from merely accepting differences to celebrating unity among members, regardless of backgrounds, in their new acquired identity as "Canadians".

In 1982, Dominion Day was officially renamed "Canada Day", symbolising the start of a new Canada where policies of

multiculturalism, bilingualism, liberal individualism and the Charter of Rights constitute the foundation of the country (Hayday, 2010). Not only were cultural performances integrated into the celebration, but more and more Canadians from different backgrounds were shown as "achievers" with their achievements in the scientific or athletic field. In addition to the national day celebration in Ottawa, each municipality organises its own celebratory activities whether in the form of parade, social gathering, community events, or firework shows.

Canada Day has evolved into a day of nation-building, and as such is exceedingly important for strengthening Canada's identity as an inclusive nation.

Finland

The Finnish Independence Day takes place on 6 December, the date when Finland declared its independence in 1917. Finland was, at that time, an autonomous part of the Russian Republic. However, because of the Russian Revolution and the turbulence Russia experienced after World War I, the Finns saw a chance to part from Russia and become independent. Whilst there were disputes as to how independence would be achieved, what was certain was that the independence of Finland was not a given; the Finns had to fight for their independence during World War II and the Winter War, when the Russians invaded Finland.

Finland is a small country, especially in terms of population. However, the Finns are very proud of their hard-won independence; their Independence Day celebration is a great tradition that is taken seriously by the whole population.

On Independence Day, the President of Finland throws a great party in the presidential castle in Helsinki for the upper echelons of Finnish society, including politicians, ambassadors, veterans, and athletes. Many people watch the celebrations on television and it is always the main subject covered in newspapers the next day.

Visiting the graves of soldiers who fought for Finland's independence is very popular. These graves, called "*sankarihaudat*" in Finnish, are "hero graves", Student unions from different universities around Finland organise torchlight processions and students walk a certain route around different cities in Finland. Their walk honours the soldiers and celebrates independence.

The United States of America

The United States of America (USA) has a reputation for being fiercely passionate about its independence; its national pride is best exemplified in the country's Independence Day, known simply as the Fourth of July. Historically, 4 July, 1776 was the day the USA legally declared its independence from Great Britain during the American Revolution by way of signing the Declaration of Independence. John Adams, an American patriot who would go on to become the second president of the USA, predicted that the American Independence Day would be "celebrated by succeeding generations as the great anniversary festival … solemnised with pomp and parade, with shows, games, sports, guns, bells, bonfires, and illumination, from one end of the continent to the other". Indeed, the Fourth of July celebrations are marked from coast to coast by barbecues, the waving of American flags, and the consumption of much alcohol.

Traditionally, many Americans celebrate the federal holiday by watching fireworks and spending time with family and friends. Many cities and counties have firework shows. Barbeque and picnic celebrations are common as well. Since it is a federally recognised holiday, most people have the day off from work and almost all shops are closed for the day. The Fourth of July celebrations are extended over a weekend if the day falls at the end of the week. Fourth of July weekend holidays are commonly held by groups of family and friends. According to statistics, 80 percent of Americans attend a barbeque, picnic, or cookout during this period.

Depending on where they come from, people celebrate Independence Day differently. County fairs are held in smaller towns, and feature popular regional foods. Many people travel to visit family and friends or go to lakes and beach towns. Independence Day is celebrated differently by everyone, but its underlying and unifying theme is to remind people of the country's hard-won independence. Americans feel differently about their nationality, but those who celebrate Independence Day and partake in the festivities are generally patriotic. It is common to see flags waving from every street corner and many dressed in patriotic clothing.

Perhaps the most striking figure associated with the Fourth of July is the cost associated with the festivities. In 2013, the US imported US$203.6 million worth of fireworks and US$4 million worth of American flags from China. Some 158 million hot dogs are eaten on the Fourth of July, enough to stretch from Washington D.C. to Los Angeles four times. There are over 14,000 firework displays and over 40,000 shells are launched.

Americans take their Independence Day seriously and spend lavishly to enjoy the festivities. In the process, they count their blessings and remind themselves of their hard-fought

struggle against a colonial power and the precious liberties they enjoy as the world's leading economic power.

Singapore

Singapore's national day falls on 9 August and marks the independence of Singapore as a sovereign nation. Unlike Canada, Singapore's independence was not a voluntary transition. Indeed, Singapore is one of the few countries in the history of the world where independence was not the choice of the prevailing government and was instead forced upon it by circumstances. Unlike France, Finland, and the USA, Singapore's sovereign status was not the result of an insurgency or a rebellion.

August 9th marks the day Singapore was forced out of Malaysia and became a reluctant new nation. There are parades, festivities, and of course the obligatory fireworks. However, what is interesting is just how these festivities are conducted.

The main event of National Day is known as the National Day Parade and is organised by a formation within the Singapore Armed Forces on a rotational basis. It requires much organisation and administration, and brings together the efforts of tens of thousands of individuals, not only in the military, but also from the civil service, volunteers, unions, and business entities. Of the various activities planned, three stand out.

The first is the parade, more specifically the choice of people included in the parade. While it will be of no surprise to others that representatives from all three arms of the Singapore Armed Forces march in the parade, what is more unusual is the fact that the formal parade includes regiments from the Singapore Police Force, Singapore Civil Defence Force, governing

political party of the time (which to date has been the People's Action Party), trade unions, students from the various uniformed groups, and representatives from business entities in Singapore.

This approach represents the concept of Total Defence in Singapore's nation-building exercise and reinforces the fact that the responsibility of the defence of the nation is not limited to the armed forces but is the responsibility of all.

The second interesting event is the Mobile Column. While it is not unusual for countries to showcase their latest military technology on their National Day, Singapore is unusual in that the Singapore Police Force and the Singapore Civil Defence Force play an important part. Those watching witness not only the readiness of the Singapore Armed Forces, but also the capabilities of the Singapore Police Force and the Singapore Civil Defence Force, again reinforcing the idea of Total Defence in nation building.

The third event of note is the performances, or, more specifically, what the organisers choose to perform during the parade. Every year, audiences are treated to different shows and performances put up by students and volunteers, but their focus remains broadly the same. For example, there are performances by different ethnic groups to reflect Singapore's racial diversity, but there is always a joint performance at the end to symbolise the nation's racial harmony. There are also performances highlighting the "Singapore Story", including important events such as our founding, independence, and economic and social progress.

Differences and Similarities

As is clear from the analysis of national day celebrations in just five countries, there are great differences in how countries gain their independence and celebrate their nationhood. The USA won its independence through a hard-fought military campaign which is celebrated till this day, while modern-day France emerged through bloodshed from within. Finland declared its independence first, but later had to repel repeated attacks by the Russians to keep its independence. In contrast, Canada earned its independence though far more peaceful means, while Singapore had independence involuntarily thrust upon it.

The scope of government involvement during the celebrations varies. While Singaporeans may be used to heavy government involvement in our National Day celebrations, Independence Day celebrations in the USA are largely organised from the ground up. While this may reflect the federal nature of the USA, it is interesting to note that Canada's government, which also has a federal system, is very involved in the Canada Day celebrations.

Yet another interesting difference is the solemnity of the occasion. For example, both Finland and the USA had to defend their independence with military means and both suffered significant casualties fighting against their respective foes. However, while the USA celebrates its Independence Day with much fanfare, Finland's Independence Day celebrations are more solemn and muted in comparison.

The national day celebrations of these five countries also share some similarities. Canada and Singapore use their respective national days to inculcate a sense of shared nationhood among their different language and ethnic communities.

Another similarity is in how national day celebrations evolve as time goes by. For example, Dominion Day in Canada, as the original Canada Day, was British-oriented, excluding a significant portion of the Canadian population. However, as time passed, Dominion Day came me to be known as Canada Day, giving a more inclusive tone to the celebrations. Likewise, in France, Bastille Day, which originated as a celebration of victory over the old regime, has since evolved into a celebration of general unity and shared values.

However, perhaps the most important similarity is that national day, no matter how it originated or is celebrated, remains the consecration of the founding of a nation and as such, is of paramount social importance to the nation. While the means of celebration may be different, they all serve to bind a nation together in shared nationhood, giving their citizens an enduring sense of pride in what their country stands for. A nation may be an "imagined political community", but its continued existence rightly deserves recognition and appreciation by all who are part of it.

Building Cross-cultural Bridges

Vani Shriya

Timoteo Marra

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"Culture is a framework in which we communicate."
– Stephen Robert

Singapore is a melting pot of cultures and traditions, its multi-ethnic population weaving a cornucopia of diversity into its very ethos. This mélange of cultures is possibly the Lion City's greatest strength and also its biggest weakness. On the one hand, perceptions and experiences shape ideas, and differences can spur innovation. On the other hand, an inability to understand other cultures can lead to miscommunication and misunderstandings, undermining productive social interactions.

Understanding begets empathy, which is a cornerstone of fruitful communication. This essay by five individuals from five different cultures uses a theoretical approach supported by empirical data to understand communication across cultures.

One of the most comprehensive studies on culture and the workplace was done by Professor Geert Hofstede, who hypothesised that national culture could be described along five cultural dimensions, namely:

    i.   Power Distance;
   ii.   Individualism vs Collectivism;
  iii.   Masculinity vs Femininity;
  iv.   Uncertainty Avoidance;
   v.   Long-term Orientation.

To facilitate comparison, countries are given a score for each metric. We apply Hofstede's analysis to five countries: Germany,

India, Italy, the Netherlands, and Singapore. The following data utilised is taken from the Hofstede Centre.

Hofstede's 5 Cultural Dimensions
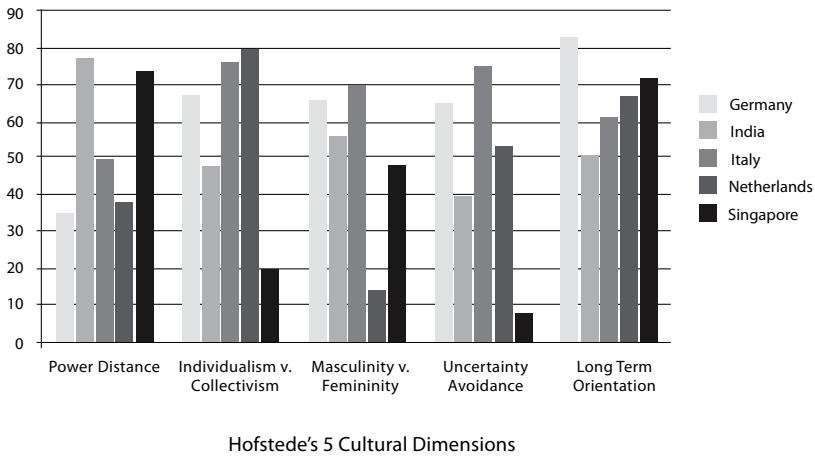
Power Distance

Power Distance refers to the extent to which disadvantaged members of a society accept the unequal distribution of power. Asian societies exhibit a higher degree of power distance than their European counterparts. The reasons for this difference are many.

Singaporeans, like Indians, place great emphasis on respecting elders and those in power, albeit due to different reasons. Singaporeans are influenced by Confucian teachings, while Indians tolerate greater Power Distance as they have learnt to accept sharply defined social inequalities and a widening gulf between the rich and poor. Those lower on the pecking order are resigned to their station and fate in life. In contrast, the three western societies on our list exhibited low-to-medium Power Distance, which can be attributed to the decentralised system of governance. Italy exhibits a slightly higher score

for Power Distance than its western neighbours due to the stark differences between attitudes in northern and southern Italy, the latter being a fairly patriarchal society.

Individualism vs Collectivism

The Asian/European divide is visible in the Individualism vs Collectivism sphere as well, but it is not as sharp as that revealed by the Power Distance dimension. The Individualism vs Collectivism index highlights how interdependent members of a society are, and whether decisions are made in the context of a multiple-member unit, such as a family or an individual.

While both Singapore and India are considered relatively collectivist societies in comparison with the other three, the degree of collectivism varies. Singapore scores the lowest on this metric out of the five countries, due to the pervasive Confucian influence that colours many aspects of Singaporean society. For instance, respectful behaviour and the preservation of social harmony are deemed essential. India is also a fairly collectivist culture, with the average Indian living a life heavily influenced by what their neighbour or third cousin twice removed thinks of them. That being said, Indian society is moulded by Hinduism, the religion of choice for a significant proportion of the population. One Hindu tenet is an unwavering belief in karma and reincarnation; an individual's decisions are solely responsible for the circumstances of their rebirth. This belief tempers the collectivist nature of the country. The three Occidental cultures all score fairly similarly on the individualism scale; the average Dutchman, German and Italian values honesty over harmony and seeks to form mutually advantageous relationships.

Masculinity vs Femininity

The Masculinity vs Femininity (MF) dimension refers to the presence of what are considered masculine or feminine traits in a society as a whole. It is not a measure of patriarchy in a nation's social fabric. Masculine societies are driven by competition, and value outward or material expressions of success. Feminine societies are more concerned with the quality of life in the country.

The Netherlands has an extremely low score on the MF index, standing out as a highly feminine society where achieving a work-life balance is paramount and people strive for equality and consensus in decision-making. Conflicts are resolved through compromise. The latter trait is also reflected in Singapore society, which has a middling score on the index. In contrast, Germany and Italy are highly masculine societies where economic success and competition are highly valued. Like Singapore, India too has a middling score on the MF index, but for different reasons. India is a highly spiritual society. This spirituality tempers the average Indian's desire to showboat.

Uncertainty Avoidance

Ambiguity is a fact of life, and risk is inherent in all situations we face. The next dimension, Uncertainty Avoidance, measures the risk appetite of individuals in a society and the activities they undertake to mitigate risk.

Singapore stands out on this metric, with an extremely low score. Though a low score usually denotes a society that is risk-ambivalent or even risk-loving, Singapore represents a paradoxical situation. Individuals have low-risk appetite, but they live in a country with clear and transparent rules. The

average Singaporean is often described as being *kiasu*, which is the fear of losing. This anxiety, taken in conjunction with the meritocratic ethos of the country, encourages people to mitigate risks in their lives. Parents, for example, would spend large amounts on private tuition lessons for their children to help them succeed in school examinations.

In contrast to Singapore, Italy has a very high score for uncertainty avoidance. Its complex legal system and bureaucracy with their unclear rules mean that the average Italian has to spend much time and resources navigating their way around the rules. Countries such as the Netherlands and Germany have middling scores. In these two countries, good governance and transparent rules mean citizens do not have to devote as much time managing uncertainty.

India's case is curious. Uncertainty is a way of life in a chaotic country like India, and the average Indian is unflustered when faced with unpredictable situations. Rules are often considered guidelines to be interpreted to one's advantage or convenience. Thus, the concept of *jugaad* – which is the untranslatable phrase meaning "where there's a will, there's a way" – allows Indians to get quick fixes and find innovative ways to overcome obstacles. *Jugaad* colours all social interactions in India.

Long-term Orientation

The Long Term Orientation (LTO) dimension measures the weight of history and traditions in influencing decision-making on challenges to a society. Societies with low LTO scores are more traditional and wary of disruptive social changes. India scores lowest on this dimension. The other four countries have medium-to-high scores.

Indians are flexible and forward-looking but they also believe in karma and are tolerant of religious diversity.

In contrast, the other four countries are more pragmatic societies. Singapore, for example, values qualities such as efficiency, hard work and thrift. Singaporeans are averse to ostentation and have a strong sense of shame as well as humility. The Netherlands, Germany, and Italy have a longer history than Singapore. They, like most Occidental cultures, score higher than Singapore on the LTO dimension.

Analysis

We chose the five countries in this essay as our group comprises nationals from these countries. The data on the five dimensions from the Hofstede Centre suggests we would differ in the way we work and communicate. As we searched for a topic that all of us could agree on, our differences became clear. The three Europeans preferred a topic which could be neatly divided up so that everyone could write their section independently. The two Asians favoured writing an integrated essay which reflected the views of all members. After much discussion, a topic was finally agreed on. The two Asians thought a group leader would be helpful in coordinating the write-up, a view not shared by the other three members who preferred to work on their own. The Asians and Europeans in the group had different working styles, with the Europeans preferring short meetings and the Asians more tolerant of longer meetings where there was more time for personal interactions.

In the process of writing this essay, group members had the opportunity to reflect on the findings of the Hofstede Centre. We agreed that the data illuminated aspects of our five national

cultures. But we also noted that, as individuals, we do not embody fully the national characteristics ascribed to us. This conclusion is not surprising as all five countries have great internal cultural and socioeconomic variations. Chinese Singaporeans differ in many respects from Malay or Indian Singaporeans. Rich Indians may not share the attitudes and values of poorer Indians. Those from north India could display quite different tendencies in terms of risk-taking and tolerance for uncertainty when compared with south Indians, just as Italians from the north of the country are said to hold different values with regard to work habits from Italians from the south.

The Indian member of the group thinks that Hofstede's analysis of Indian culture does not ring true. Indian society, she believes, is more collectivist and masculine than suggested by Hofstede's data. She observes that Indians in the upper strata of Indian society were anxious about meeting the expectations of others in their circle while poorer Indians were more likely to make sacrifices for the greater good of their families and groups. She accepts, though, that India is a big country with great regional differences, and generalisations may mislead as much as they may enlighten our understanding of a national culture. It is therefore important to look at national stereotypes, useful though they may be, as a shorthand description, with a sceptical eye.

In working together to produce this essay, we learnt two lessons. One, a greater awareness of cultural differences can make for more productive interactions among people from different countries. Two, in the business world especially, being open and sensitive to individual differences can help a lot in building a good working relationship with people from other cultures.

Faces and Facets of Singapore

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The days when a mention of Singapore would prompt a query as to whether it is located in China have long passed. Today, a Google search by anyone with a working Internet connection will inform them that Singapore is a nation with 63 islands set in the South China Sea, off the Malaysian Peninsula; that it boasts a per capita income of over US$55,000, the third highest in the world; and bans the sale of chewing gum.

On 23 March 2015, the world's newspapers reported Singapore's grief as the man whose vision and leadership moulded a rough-and-ready port town into a first-world success story.

This essay is not an elegy for Lee Kuan Yew. It is, however, an amalgamation of a eulogy and analysis of his legacy: a global economic powerhouse occasionally labelled as an authoritarian state. Lee's policies shaped much of Singapore and how it was perceived, and it is this foundation that subsequent administrations built upon to create the Singapore that we know today. This result may be attributed to the general cohesiveness of the country's goals over the years: to build a clean country, to facilitate transparent administration, to draw a photogenic skyline, and to create a playground stocked with world-class facilities.

However, as we move into our nation's 50th year of independence, the question of whether we have succeeded in these aims arises. Singapore is indeed efficient, bustling, and cosmopolitan. But are these facts enough to override the darker aspects of Singapore's governance?

From Third World to First

Sixty years ago, the dream city that Singapore is today would have been a figment of an idealist's imagination. From overcrowded

and poor living conditions, Singapore's transformation to an everything-hub is facilitated and driven by its extraordinary infrastructure. With the gears and cogs of the country running smoothly, it becomes much easier for Singaporeans to carry on with their daily lives productively without worrying if their country is breaking down around them.

An example of this vaunted efficiency is Singapore's transportation system, which is one of the most orderly and cost-efficient public transport systems in the world. The MRT lines connect almost all corners of the city-state, with trains running at two to five minute intervals. Where the trains do not go, the buses, which serve more than 400 routes, will. Within the small 716 square metre island, there are nine major expressways with a total length of 150 kilometre facilitating the flow of traffic – which is also regulated by road taxes and ownership levies on private vehicles – creating enough capacity to mitigate the snarls of rush hours to and fro from work each day.

This efficiency is not limited to the internal arteries of the island. Changi International Airport has been consistently hailed as the best airport in the world. Handling about 55 million passengers in 2014, it has won more than 250 prestigious awards. Not only does it put Singapore on the world map, it brings people into Singapore with the efficiency that has become a hallmark of Singaporean service. Changi Airport is also the home base of a Singaporean titan that literally flies itself across the world: Singapore Airlines. For many commuters, the first glimpse they get of the Singaporean standard of service is on an SIA flight. Sleek, safe, and efficient, Singapore Airlines is an award-winning ambassador for Singapore.

It is therefore unsurprising that other nations, after considering Singapore's Lego-modelesque infrastructure, seek

to build that efficiency into their own countries. International Enterprise Singapore signed an agreement with the Infrastructure Corporation of the Andhra Pradesh government, in December 2014, to conduct urban planning for its new capital city. This is an example of how Singapore's efficiency – a manufactured operating standard that it achieved to survive and succeed in the face of overwhelming odds – has become part of its marketable global image.

However, has Singapore's near-clinical efficiency come at the cost of Singaporeans' heart? According to the pollster Gallup in 2012, Singaporeans are both the least emotional and the saddest people in the world. Unsurprisingly, local corporations such as Starhub retaliated by running advertisements showing how happy people were, and in 2015, Singapore was ranked amongst the world's top 25 happiest countries. It is unclear as to what changed amongst the populace (if indeed anything did) in the intervening three years between the polls, or even if polls on unquantifiable qualities such as happiness can be considered accurate. Nevertheless, the determination of Singapore to climb over pitfalls and prove its detractors wrong, as it attempts to do in this circumstance, is laudable.

Clean Glamour

The bustle of Singapore incorporates a lot of different kinds of activity: there is the cash-fuelled machine of the thriving economy noted above, the glitzy gloss of tourist attractions, and the roar of the crowd and glare of the spotlights at sporting competitions and concerts. All of these contribute to the perception of Singapore as the place to be: wether it is for business, holiday, or international events.

It is without question that Singapore is a magnet for tourists. Its geographical position in the heart of Southeast Asia

allows it to be used as a base for tourists hopping around the region, and its history as a British trading station and the cultural melting pot of the peninsula make it a unique historical gem in its own right. Apart from visiting museums and old forts, travellers can also look forward to the glamour of the attractions comprising Singapore's skyline: the Marina Bay facilities, for instance, which boast an infinity pool and nightclub. Interestingly, these facilities also house a casino – something that the late Lee Kuan Yew asserted would only be built over his dead body. Yet, the government eventually went ahead in the interests of the long-term sustainability of the economy – a decision that Lee eventually understood as being necessary for Singapore's continued relevance in the world. However, the government was cognisant of the accompanying vices that tend to follow the construction of casinos: gambling addiction, debt, and illegal money lending, for instance. In response, a framework of regulations dictating liquidity thresholds and allowing for the imposition of visiting limits and exclusions of problem gamblers was implemented in order to shield Singaporeans from these untoward consequences.

While most would agree that it is the role of the government to impose restrictions on vices such as gambling, it is interesting to note that there is a growing pool of Singaporeans who argue that the time of the nanny state has come and gone. A recently enacted prohibition on the sale and public consumption of alcohol past 10.30pm prompted either strong public approval or equally vehement public disapproval, depending on whether one was reading the local newspapers or trawling through one's Facebook newsfeed. The question of how the demands of an increasingly liberal young population – who will eventually join the workforce and the voting

pool – will square with the conservative, paternalistic attitude of the state is difficult in its answering. Only time will tell as to the direction in which governance will swing, but it is an issue that certainly bears watching.

Singapore also presents itself as a centre for regional and international events. One such event is the hosting of a Formula One Grand Prix race. Each September, Formula One personnel and supporters flock to Singapore to watch the F1 Night Race – a spectacle which generates a great deal of tourism revenue. The F1 event showcases and boosts Singapore's image as a "vibrant and distinctive global city". The race track winds through Singapore's most notable attractions; as such, sports channels transmit the backdrop of a beautifully lit city skyline, the unique Esplanade concert halls, and the Marina Bay resort to F1 fans in their living rooms all over the world. In addition, the recent BNP Paribas WTA Finals was held in the newly constructed Singapore Sports Hub to showcase both the newly constructed stadium as well as the vibrancy of the local sports scene.

However, even in supporting and hosting events that would draw in crowds and generate tourism revenue, the Singaporean authorities are careful to ensure that the core principles of Singapore as a clean, generally crime-free city are honoured. Such an observation can be gleaned from the treatment of a recent application to host the Future Music Festival Asia (FMFA) in Singapore. What the organisers did not expect was that they would have to cancel the festival less than a week before it was set to begin due to their failure to obtain a public entertainment licence. The reason provided for this was the authorities' serious concern with potential drug abuse, as evidenced by the Australian authorities seizing about 7500 ecstasy pills believed to be bound for the Brisbane festival.

This led to several complaints, as a large number of fans had already bought tickets and made travel arrangements for the festival. Whilst this has been viewed by the international community as another admirable expression of Singapore's hard-line stance towards drugs and crime, some have seen it as a step backwards for building the arts scene, as Singapore's paranoia rears its ugly head once more.

Human Rights

Local radio station Gold 90.5 FM once ran an advertisement featuring the tagline "Hear only the good stuff." While this is a comfortable way to coast through life, it is not possible for Singapore to blinker the world to see only the glitzy, clean, cosmopolitan side of it. Singapore's efficiency and cosmetic beauty does not erase its shortcomings – particularly with regard to its human rights track record and social issues.

Singapore has been a powerful magnet in attracting tourists and expatriates because of its reputation of being a relatively crime-free and safe society. This is largely credited to the state's firm belief that the rule of law must be upheld to ensure stability, equality and social justice, which form the bedrock of strong economic growth. This is recognised by multi-national companies and international organisations, which for the past 50 years have successfully set up their headquarters and businesses in Singapore and thrived.

Yet, Singapore's affluent and mature population, being influenced by increasing human rights concerns due to the proliferation of social media and globalisation, have called for an evolution of domestic laws to match peremptory international norms. The state has taken steps to moderate its approach to some of its more controversial laws in response to this.

For instance, the mandatory death penalty has been substantially softened to give judges discretion, without compromising on national interests. For instance, if drug convicts provide information pertaining to the inner workings of the drug syndicates, they may escape the gallows. Another example is the government's hands-off approach towards the LGBT community's annual event, Pink Dot, in support for inclusiveness, diversity and the freedom to love. This is despite Singapore's controversial gay law that prohibits male homosexual behaviour, which remained in our statute books to reflect the apparent conservative society as purported by the state. Such moves are strategic, because the government is mindful of not losing political points at the expense of attracting the lucrative "pink dollar" into Singapore.

Singapore has also unintentionally made herself a name in the global community through the implementation of unusual laws, the most famous of which is the prohibition of the sale of chewing gum. Other examples include disallowing durians on public trains and allowing a Muslim man to have four wives if he fulfills certain requirements, which is a strange religious concession in a secular society. However, despite their oddities, these laws are rooted in the history and ideologies of Singapore's multi-racial and multi-religious society. Inadvertently, they yield a unique and fascinating insight to the perception of Singapore's legal landscape being overtly rigid and harsh.

Singapore's human rights record has also been in the limelight and is often scrutinised by its foreign counterparts, especially when such draconian laws are implemented mercilessly on their nationals. In the late 1990s, the case of Michael Fay being sentenced to caning for theft and vandalism caused a sensational diplomatic storm between the USA and Singapore. In recent times, the harshly criticised crackdowns on the 2013 Little India riot and the 2012 SMRT bus strikes

further amplified the need for Singapore to review its laws and consider new ways to safeguard the human rights of all.

Another major stumbling block for Singapore is its reluctance to sign several international human rights conventions because of the existence of certain domestic laws. For instance, the Internal Security Act allows the state the right to detain a suspect indefinitely without being charged or tried in court. The government has explained that the ISA is used to pre-emptively neutralise threats and is preventive in nature, rather than punitive. This has ensured that Singapore could effectively cripple the Jemaah Islamiyah terrorist organisation in December 2001, when the group plotted attacks on diplomatic missions and key installations in Singapore. Singapore also defended its capital-punishment stance as a criminal-justice issue, stating that it remains legal under international law and protects the fundamental human right of its citizens to live in a safe environment. Other accounts of human rights abuses include the restriction of press freedom, corporal punishment, and the alleged detention and lawsuits against political opponents.

However, laws ought not to be reviewed merely for the sake of satisfying international pressure because this undermines a country's resolve towards defending her sovereignty. Rights should instead be redefined to take cognisance of specific national circumstances and changing global trends. In the next 50 years, Singapore should, first, move away from playing on the defensive and encourage active dialogue with its political allies to help them appreciate the social challenges faced by a small, dense and diverse society. Second, Singapore must play a constructive role in international affairs and uphold international law to amass credibility and trust from her international counterparts. Last, incremental steps must be taken to lessen the moral backlash against criminal

penalties inherited from a bygone era. Corporal punishment could be restricted only to physically injurious offences, and more transparency and safeguards can be infused in laws that give the state unconstrained powers to restrict certain freedoms. Moratoriums and referendums on controversial issues like homosexuality, liquor control and national service can encourage serious, reasonable debates amongst citizens and reflect a mature society that Singaporeans can be proud of. If our laws can eventually reflect a fully functional democracy and a more compassionate society, Singapore's standing on this global city stage can certainly be enhanced several-fold.

In Sum

The contrast between an indulgent, cosmopolitan city with a thriving nightlife with its pragmatic, almost utilitarian politics is striking, but it is Singapore's path to walk. It has carved its own niche in the space of the globe, and it has done extraordinarily well in keeping the world's attention in an age where people are always looking for the next big thing. Yet, its track record for human rights and freedoms – excused by the blanket of conservatism – does colour its reputation in the wider international sphere. While we toast to Singapore's first 50 years of independence, it is hoped that in the next half century, social issues will be given greater attention while the country seeks to achieve a sustainable level of economic progress.

Missing the Forest for the (Super) Trees

Nick Chiam Zhi Wen

Teo Yi Heng

"Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined."
— Benedict Anderson (1991)

The Eden of the East

n 1980, then Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew dreamt of a modern and urban metropolitan island-city that could nevertheless emanate vibrant, rustic charms:

"Singapore can become a green shady city filled with fruits and flowers, a city worthy of an industrious people whose quest, progress is matched by their appreciation of beauty, of nature."
— Lee Kuan Yew (1980)

Some 50 years later, our little red dot has indeed become painted green.

Our urban jungle has been transformed into an oasis of the region, a somewhat mystical Eden of the East. Singapore's streetscape and garden-city roads are now characteristically lined with increasingly diverse varieties of trees, where the "harshness of tarmac, concrete" is "softened by the natural trees, flowers, and birds" (Wong, 2014).

Along these lines, there has also been a deliberate integration of greenery into the architecture of high-rise buildings, perhaps influenced by some version of the sky-rise greening

movement world-wide. All public housing estates are surrounded by a wide range of flora, creeper plants enshroud our pedestrian walkways and overhead bridges, and rooftop parks are becoming increasingly prevalent.

With more than 3,318 hectares of land devoted to parks, park connectors, and other green spaces, it is clear just how much emphasis Singapore places on greenery. One is never too far from an Angsana or a rain-tree in Singapore.

Cultivating the 'City in a Garden'

Interestingly, our Garden City had a curious change of direction in 2008. Singapore's unoriginal 'Garden City' narrative was re-characterised into (an ostensibly more nuanced conception of) a 'City in a Garden'. That is, beyond being a city which merely features some horticultural adornments, Singapore wanted to actually become nestled in a lush mantle of tropical greenery. In particular, as a 'City in a Garden' (which was supposedly an upgrade from a mere 'Garden City'), it was envisioned that the dichotomy between the 'urban' and the 'green' would be functionally dissolved. More than just greater connectivity from green spaces to urban zones, the 'new' focus was therefore increasing convergence and blending within the civil landscape which benefits both people and nature.

Nevertheless, semantics aside, it was clear from the outset that cities around the world had already seriously contemplated urban greening policies as far back as the late nineteenth century. In 1898, Sir Ebenezer Howard from Great Britain famously proposed the concept of integrated green spaces within the townscape and pioneered the concept of 'zoning'. In fact, Howard's ideas led to the creation of the first garden city in the world – Letchworth Garden City of Hertfordshire,

England – the ideals upon which Singapore's own garden city appears to be modelled upon much later.

However, Singapore has become the only successful Garden City in the world, with more than 5 million inhabitants by the turn of the twenty-first century. The Letchworth Garden City, by comparison, has a population of only about 33,000.

To some, it may appear that the re-characterisation exercise was simply part of a deliberate attempt to carve out another Singaporean niche, even though the political reason for the change in label was never officially pronounced. Indeed, whilst there was nothing inherently unique about calling ourselves a Garden City, Singapore remains the only country in the world to have proclaimed, quite unabashedly, to be a City in a Garden.

Growing Symbols: Heritage, Design, or Both?

Our niche thus created, it was only a matter of time before greenery crept into the lexicon of Singapore's nationhood narrative.

The concept of 'nation' in the Singaporean context seems to be an abstract blend of patriotic imagination and shared experience.

Benedict Anderson conceptualised nationalism as social construct in the purist sense; within the minds of each community member "lives the image of their communion". In the contemporary context, this nationalistic sense of "togetherness" is used instrumentally to interlace disparate groups into a nation, thus the "imagined community". The Singaporean identity is perhaps, likewise, somewhat artificial.

Singapore's eventual status as a global horticultural icon can appear, to some, to be a theatrical farce. After all, not very

much is authentic, and not very much is ours by natural heritage. Very little of the greenery which now dominates our cityscape is actually native to Singapore. Indeed, Mr Lee's favourite Angsana was only introduced into Singapore in the late nineteenth century. Even the rain-trees, now ubiquitous in Singapore's parks and roads, are native to South America. It is also clear that the cacti and sunflower species within the 'natural trail' at the Singapore Changi Airport transit lounges are alien to our soil.

Nevertheless, it is clear that authenticity can be created, and nationalism can be designed. Consistent with the Andersonian conception of nationalism, Singapore's style of nationhood demonstrates that people do not need to inherit native symbols to legitimately relate to a national identity. To the Singaporeans who remember growing up with Angsana and rain-trees surrounding their homes and schooling premises, these trees could genuinely constitute part of the intimate way in how they understand the 'authentic' Singaporean experience.

Beyond Theatrics: The Fruits of Labour

Perhaps a more meaningful question to explore is whether the cultivation (or preservation) of Singapore's natural heritage is, per se, a virtue. The inconvenient truth is that any pursuit of finding an original and authentic Singaporean identity in the organic sense will itself be an exercise in futility; after all, we are a country founded by immigrants, built by immigrants, and inhabited by the children and grandchildren of immigrants. As such, any attempt to weave us together will likely be artificial.

Nonetheless, we make do, and we succeed.

Notably, the business of growing symbols is not new to Singapore. In 1972, the nascent city-state successfully engineered a national symbol which expanded into a global icon. That year, flight attendants of Singapore Airlines (SIA) were dressed in the distinctive *sarong kebaya*, in what was to become the de facto uniform for Singapore's flag carrier. Even though the *kebaya* is a traditional blouse-dress native to Indonesia, the 'Singapore Girl' wearing the *kebaya* has today become an award-winning visual trademark and tourism brand for SIA and Singapore as a whole.

However, technology has recently become more prominent in the equation of heritage, design, and authenticity. This reinforced the pragmatic, economic slant which permeates the designing of the Singapore brand. Indeed, engineering national symbols can be a very lucrative business!

Consider, for example, the creation of the Gardens by the Bay in 2012. The Bay Gardens is a massive 101-hectare botanic gardens project, constituting an unbroken circlet of natural greenery embracing the entire Marina Bay region. The project was almost a symbolic manifestation of the convergence philosophy, informed by considerations of vertical greenery: tree-like, artificial superstructures ("supertrees") were intimately embedded within the natural horticultural ring. The super-trees are not only natural gardens in themselves. They also harvest solar energy which provides power to automated, climate-controlled flora conservatories connected to them. Furthermore, these artificial superstructures constitute the architectural nexus between various segments of the natural landscape, including supporting aerial walkways. They are, to say the least, an architectural and horticultural marvel.

In many ways, the Bay Gardens, as a direct extension of Singapore's central business district, dramatically embody the

potent blend of the natural and the artificial in Singapore. On one hand, given the large amount of financial and political investment in the Bay Gardens, the project itself shows just how seriously Singapore takes the concept of a City in a Garden. The garden is an oasis of greenery and nature in the middle of the city, and includes many plants like the South African Fynbos and the Australian outback. However, most of the plants in the Gardens are not native to Singapore, and were artificially transplanted here. The metallic superstructures, solar-powered super trees and climate-controlled flower domes is also artificially constructed and in no way natural.

Therein lies one of the defining characteristics of Singapore's approach to the concept of a City in a Garden: the artificial glorification of the natural. Cynics may call it an oxymoron, but it works. Indeed, the Bay Gardens has been crowned one of the world's "coolest" green initiatives and Singapore's "hottest new attraction" by CNN.

Singapore Imagined

If one takes a closer look at Singapore, one would find that there are many other aspects of Singapore that are artificially created and planned, as opposed to developing naturally. Some have used this as a point for criticism or ridicule, both domestically and overseas. But put another way, this 'artificiality' also means that Singapore is not the product of blind luck, but rather the product of human ingenuity and hard work. This is not something to be ashamed about.

In fact, this point reinforces the notion that the future of Singapore rests less on the vagaries of chance, but more in the imaginations of her people.

So the question is: What can you imagine for Singapore?

Singapore: The Country Where You Cannot Chew Gum?

Felix Brockerhoff

Introduction

E very country has its stereotypes or is known for something special. Germans have their cars and eat a lot of *schnitzel* with *sauerkraut*. Belgians have good chocolate, the French have their gourmet food, the Italians are known for their pizza and their energetic hand gestures, and eastern Europeans can drink litres of vodka without getting drunk. Americans are known for eating a lot of fast food and ranking their opinions and their method of doing things above any other system.

However, what are Singaporeans known for? Has Singapore managed to make itself a name within the world? Are Singaporean stereotypes seen as nasty habits or as best practices? This essay aims to analyse stereotypes and give conclusive answers to those questions and explore the different stereotypes about Singapore in the world and how they differ from region to region.

It will first consider Singapore itself before going on to consider stereotypes that Americans hold of Singaporeans, followed by prejudices held by Europeans against Singapore and how they compare to the American stereotypes examined.

Singapore in General

Within the last 50 years, Singapore has become the leading nation in terms of economic performance within the ASEAN region. The government has largely managed to eradicate corruption, crime, and chewing gum, all of which are known to create enormous inefficiencies. The Singapore government has guided the country from poverty to enormous wealth by adapting capitalism to an Asian context. However, this

impressive success story required some, from a western point of view, restrictive laws, which in turn have given rise to very different stereotypes of Singapore in different regions of the world.

Singapore in the Mind of Americans

The American comedian and actor Seth Rogan said in an interview in 2014 that Singapore "must be a really awesome place to live, unless you are a gay guy who likes chewing gum". His ironic comment reflects two stereotypes about Singapore that are partly true. First, chewing gum is legal, but the distribution of it when it is not for medical reasons is illegal. Most Americans think the ban on gum is more of a bad joke. They do not understand why it is banned and do not bother to consider the beneficial effect of this ban – which is the maintenance of clean public places. In the eyes of Americans, the ban on gum stands as an example of the excessive restrictiveness of the country. Second, gay males do not face direct persecution as they would in America or some European states. While same-sex marriage and the adoption of children by homosexual couples are forbidden, the archaic prohibition against anal sex is not strictly enforced. Moreover, Singapore, as a nation consisting of many ethnically and culturally diverse individuals, is largely tolerant – and this tolerance extends to the private lives of its citizens. In conclusion, homosexuals may live less liberal lives in Singapore than they would in parts of the European Union (EU), but they are not persecuted and punished for their sexual orientation, as is the case for homosexuals in, for example, Russia.

   Another stereotype is that Singapore is governed by a totalitarian regime and that elections are not legitimate, as voters do not have another choice than voting for the ruling party:

the PAP. While it is true that there are fewer political parties in Singapore than in America or Europe, Singaporeans can vote, the elections are clean and voters do have a choice in political candidates to back. However, the PAP has been in power since 1959 and holds a great deal of influence over Singaporeans politics, even though it lost some power within the last two elections (Singapore Government, 2015). Maybe Americans classify Singapore as a dictatorship because the population has less freedom than in the USA. Again, they fail to understand the consequence that the curtailment of certain 'civil liberties' has. The government tries to design their policies in such a way that the aggregated utility of the population is maximised. While this might sound very abstract, it does have practical effect. For instance, a prohibition on the consumption of alcohol in public places past certain times of the night ensure that people who want to have silence do not get disturbed. A democracy without restrictions brings a lot of inefficiencies with it, as not everybody's desires can be fulfilled.

However, not all stereotypes are bad. Most American citizens assume that Singapore is a country filled with hard-working people. In fact this is a generalisation they make about Asia in total (Martilla Communications Group , 2001). They also find that Singaporeans value education highly.

In general, Americans do not think negatively about Singapore. However, they do hold negative prejudices against Singapore. This is mainly due to the fact that Singapore is not well known in America. It is considered as a country with a remarkable success story but it is located on the other side of the globe and is governed by restrictive laws. They fail to understand that those regulations are among other factors also responsible for the success of Singapore.

Singapore in the Mind of Europeans

If a European is asked what he knows about Singapore, one of the first answers might be that it is expensive. After living here for one month, I can confirm that it is more expensive than the most expensive parts of Europe. However, the many rules and regulations that govern everyday life – for example, that no eating or drinking is allowed in MRT stations or on MRT trains – are not well known of in Europe. Nevertheless, Europeans know about the strict laws against drug trafficking, as cases where foreign tourists get punished for drug trafficking are occasionally reported in the European press.

Cleanliness is another stereotype about Singapore. Other than Americans, Europeans tend to ignore the cause for being clean, namely, the restrictive civil laws, but admire the effect. My former geography teacher once said: "If you ever have the chance to travel to Singapore, seize it! It is so clean that you can literally eat from the ground." Europeans appreciate the cleanliness and do not seem offended by laws that forbid chewing gum. Maybe they are just fed up by dirty stations or others smoking at the bus stop.

One reason many students go to Singapore is that they want to go to Asia without going to Asia. It has been said that Singapore is Asia for beginners. It borrows heavily from developed, western nations, but adapts them to its Asian roots and values. Hence, another stereotype, which is true as well, is that Singapore is multicultural. This makes it very popular for travellers. This is because the city has many different facets, and serves as a basis for travellers to reach out to different parts of Southeast Asia as it is located conveniently in the middle of it. Thus, Singapore is known for being a melting pot for different cultures: the cultures of residents as well as those of tourists from all over the world.

Another, and maybe the most positive and most important stereotype, is that Singaporeans work hard and are efficient. This is perhaps the most truthful stereotype that there is out there. Singaporeans are known for their lifestyle of "work hard, play hard". They try to push their time to its limit and fit as much in it as possible. At university, they even promote this lifestyle. In Europe and America, a student who hides himself in the library the whole day is seen as boring and other people would be call him a "nerd". At Singapore Management University (SMU) those people are called "smuggers" and they even proudly wear t-shirts proclaiming themselves to be so. SMU even promotes this work attitude by selling those shirts and making it desirable to be a "smugger". Most Europeans do not understand this kind of student life, but the stereotype of being hardworking is generally positive and always met with approval.

In sum, Singapore has a positive reputation in Europe and the stereotypes that Europeans have of Singapore are treated as fact. Singapore's efficiency and cleanness greatly impress Europeans. Yet, some Europeans hesitate to travel to Singapore because they are afraid of physical punishment in case they flout certain laws.

Conclusion

There are different stereotypes about Singapore out there. Many Americans do not understand the reasons behind Singapore's laws while many Europeans are more impressed by the efficiency of the Singapore system. Singapore is seen a bit more positively in Europe than in the USA, although both regions show a positive attitude towards Singapore. The remarkable development of Singapore over the past few

decades has left a strong impression on people in North America and Europe. But not many really know this little country well. More can be done to promote a better understanding of its exceptional approach to many social and economic issues.

The Singapore Palate: Are We What We Eat?

Celine Fogde

Elizabeth Fong Lin

Food in Singapore is more than mere sustenance. It is a religion.

Grandmothers, mothers, and domestic helpers wake at the crack of dawn to make the daily pilgrimage down to the wet market, critically weighing their way through armfuls of leafy vegetables and buckets of still-wriggling fish. Masses of office workers will spend the majority of their lunch break queueing for their craving of the day, calmly shuffling forward as the cacophony of a hawker centre at peak hour blares around them. Hundreds of peckish university students will drive cross-country to stand in line at their favourite hawker stall, because nothing else quite matches up to the *char kway teow* here.

The diagnosis is clear. No matter their race, language, or religion, Singaporeans are prey to a national obsession with food.

The breadth and uniqueness of Singapore's local culinary offerings can be described as a *rojak* – a mixture of origins, culture, and tastes. As a bustling, free port in Southeast Asia, Singapore attracted working migrants – both temporary and permanent – from all around the region. These migrants brought the heat of Indian spices, the warmth of Cantonese soups, and the fragrance of pandan leaves with them. Over the years, the dishes of the homelands of our forefathers became our dishes, pared down and kicked up in this melting pot of culture and culinary skill.

To foreigners, Singapore itself may seem like a plate of *rojak* – a mess of ingredients tossed haphazardly together and emptied out onto greaseproof paper for diners to pick at with *satay* sticks. We are a cultural hodgepodge of people with our own disparate backgrounds and cultural histories. Yet, in bringing our own traditions and cultures to this island, we have shared and mingled them in nationhood, creating a new sum of our parts.

This intermingling of cultures was also a catalyst for the creation of fusion food before the term even became fashionable. An example of this is the creation of the Hainanese pork chop – a variant of western pork chops developed by Hainanese cooks for their British employers. These cooks would marinate the pork chops in oyster sauce and HP sauce to suit local taste buds before frying them and serving them with a roux-based brown sauce.

This marriage of European culinary technique with local flavours is not merely a unique contribution to local cuisine – it is also a reflection of Singapore's attitude towards diplomacy and its place in the world. While Singapore's foundation was built on the back of foreign investment from mainly western firms, it remains a key player in the Southeast Asian region. An example of this is its role in establishing the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in partnership with Malaysia and Indonesia. ASEAN serves as a regional economic bloc that deals with, largely, economic concerns amongst its member states. Even now, Singapore remains an attractive destination for foreign investment, and with ASEAN's goal of regional economic integration – hopefully by this year – it is likely to remain a global destination and a regional powerhouse.

Thus, like the melding of flavours and techniques involved in cooking Hainanese chicken rice, Singapore's foreign policy – a careful balance of western handclasps and Asian chumming – is a unique concoction tailored to the Singaporean taste.

Indeed, it is this blend of attitudes that has built our economic miracle – the influx of foreign investment coupled with pragmatism and conservative thrift has resulted in a country that now boasts one of the highest numbers of millionaires per capita.

The expansion of local wallets has heralded an expansion in the culinary palate of Singaporeans: instead of limiting one's

diet to cheap and quick hawker food, Singaporeans are now willing and able to spend more on sustenance at sit-down restaurants, or grab a quick bite from western fast-food joints before heading back to the office to churn out the numbers that keep the country going.

Singapore has become a destination and inspiration for famous chefs, bakers, and food critics. Imaginative French baker Gontran Cherrier has opened a French bakery in Tiong Bahru, Singapore's unofficial new hipster enclave. Celebrity chef Gordon Ramsay is slated to open his London concept, Bread Street Kitchen, in Singapore later on in this year. Naked Chef Jamie Oliver has opened his namesake Italian restaurant at Harbourfront. These are but a few of the many renowned culinary giants who have set up shop on our island because they are aware that the business of selling and eating food in Singapore is serious and thriving.

Yet, despite the influx of fancy restaurants, it appears that the growth and maintenance of local hawker culture is flagging. The first generation of hawkers – those rehoused from the streets to hawker centres in the 1970s – pay heavily subsidised rental for their stalls, while other stalls are tendered according to market price. While some tendered bids may be as low as S$10, it is not uncommon for them to be in the range of the thousands. Such rising costs make it increasingly difficult for stallholders to both dish out cheap food and turn a decent profit. Hawking is turning into an increasingly expensive but equally exhausting venture, with the consequence that fewer locals are venturing into it as a vocation.

This in turn has led to a shift in the cultural composition of cooks – Hainanese chicken rice stalls may be operated by Hokkien cooks, for instance, and Teochew porridge stalls in food courts could be manned by staff on work permits from Guangdong, China. And, as with any process with a creative

output, the skill and inspiration of the cooks behind the dishes will vary according to their experiences. Is a plate of Hainanese chicken rice prepared by a Hokkien cook still considered Hainanese chicken rice, even though it incorporates a non-traditional twist invented by the cook? That is a question that has no answer, but it bears noting that as the cultural nuances of our hawker centres shift, our local fare will inevitably evolve along with it.

In some cases, completely new cuisine is imported into our heartlands altogether. We are finding more unusual offerings in our corner coffee shops, like *foie gras* in Joo Chiat and salad bars in Golden Mile. Attracted in a large part by cheaper rental prices than those in fancier establishments, these cuisines are working their way into the local repertoire. For instance, it seems that no hawker centre or *kopitiam* today is complete without a "western food stall", but this was not originally hawker fare 50 years ago.

The process of the absorption of foreign food into a local context is exemplified in Botak Jones. The brainchild of an ex-expatriate turned Singapore citizen, this chain of popular hawker stalls serving hearty American fare at affordable prices is a transplant from another soil that has managed to take root and thrive here in the tropics. The foods of the world are being served up in the most Singaporean of circumstances, and, like the established hawker fare before them, are slowly being assimilated into local culture.

This is an apt metaphor for the drawing of new citizens into the Singaporean fold: Singapore has grown to be more rooted in the world, and it is this sophistication and welcoming openness that attracts potential new citizens. There are numerous policy reasons behind the process of accepting new citizens into the Singaporean fold, including mitigating the falling local birth rate. However, this grafting also has another result:

the pool of Singaporeans – descended from migrants – is constantly being added to, such that we will always have a new well of experiences, and food, to draw from. If we maintain this policy of openness, it is likely that in 50 years, the landscape of our country – both gastronomic and otherwise – will be as different to us as our society now is unfamiliar to those who remember Singapore 50 years ago.

Even now, looking for foreign foods in Singapore is relatively easy. However, hunting for local Singaporean food as it stands now while overseas is a lot more difficult. *Pad Thai* at the corner Thai restaurant in Paris is just not the same as authentic, wok-kissed *char kway teow*. Buying fish heads to make fish-head curry in Oregon involves driving to the market in the early morning to catch the fishmonger before he feeds the 'odds and ends' to his cat. Everybody has heard of Singapore noodles but are nothing like anything sold in Singapore.

However, when one does chance upon Singaporean food – or, at the very least, Southeast Asian food – out in the world, chances are that it is cooked by a fellow hungry Singaporean. For instance, born and bred Singaporean Cheryl Chin operates a food truck selling *roti prata*, fried *bee hoon*, *char kway teow*, and *laksa* in Texas. It may not taste exactly the same as what we would get at Lau Pa Sat, but at least, for a brief moment, a homesick Singaporean can feel the heat of the tropical sun on her face and hear the roar of the lunch crowd in her ears.

The Singapore in Singapore Noodles

Racheal Wong Shu Yi

dentity is a peculiar thing. The Oxford English dictionary defines 'identity' as the fact of being who or what a person or thing is – but what if the identity of a place is heterogeneous such that there is no one fact that is its identity?

"Singapore noodles" is a dish familiar to many foreigners and few locals. Ask a Singaporean, regardless of his ethnic background, who has never tried it and he might refer you to a myriad of local noodle dishes with a puzzled look. Ask a Singaporean who has tried it and you may get a reply that is not polite or even angry. A noodle dish named after our country but which is unlike anything you will find in the little red dot. This is perhaps a microcosm of the dichotomy between the Singaporean's Singapore and the Singapore known to the world. Singapore Noodles is to the world what are burgers are in America, a staple in our everyday lives. It seems we have been thoroughly misunderstood. Singapore Noodles is not one dish, but a variety of noodle dishes from various cultures. If you are what you eat, what are Singaporeans really then?

It is difficult to put one's finger on what the Singaporean identity actually is. Taking Singapore noodles as foreign perception of Singapore, while the world may be mistaken about our food culture, it might not have gotten Singapore completely wrong.

For starters, the recipe includes the following ingredients: rice vermicelli, curry powder, soy sauce, rice wine, bird's eye chilli (chilli *padi* in Singapore), shitake mushrooms, *char siu* pork, ginger and a mixture of spices. While Singapore noodles as a dish may be foreign to Singaporeans, it is undoubtedly representative of the Singaporean identity. If nothing else, it captures the diversity that is the essence of Singapore's society. Rice vermicelli makes up the main bulk of the dish

like the Chinese make up the bulk of Singapore's population. The blend of curry powder, representative of the Indians, and various spices, representative of the Malays, give the dish its unique flavour, while the other ingredients add texture to the staple, just as the other races and cultures apart from the Chinese, Malay and Indians fuse with the Singaporean experience.

A melting pot of sorts, Singapore is a multicultural city-state with an extremely diverse population. A June 2014 survey reveals that 25 percent of the population are foreigners. This figure excludes Permanent Residents (PRs). The local Singaporean population is made up of 74 percent Chinese, 14 percent Malay, 9 percent Indians and 3 percent Others. The Chinese comprise a variety of different dialect-speaking groups and the Indian many groups speaking different languages.

In addition to this racial diversity, there is also religious diversity in the country. Protestantism in different denominations, Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism, Taoism, and Catholicism are some of the dominant religions in Singapore, with other religions including Jainism, Sikhism, and Baha'i faith also practised. This religious diversity is not only present, but also respected and accommodated. The Inter-Religious Organisation (Singapore) brings religious leaders from different communities in Singapore to converse and interact, understanding and appreciating each other's needs and practices. Every year, before the annual National Day Parade and Singapore's Formula One Night Race, religious leaders from the main religions get together to bless the grounds on which the events held. These are some of the few manifestations of Singapore's multicultural society.

But if we go one step further to examine Singaporeans' reactions to Singapore noodles, we might not be as accepting

of diversity as we Singaporeans would like to believe. This is manifested in the blatant rejection and disgust that many Singaporeans have for Singapore noodles. A friend went so far as to call it an abomination and an insult to our local fare. While the reaction is understandable (considering Singaporeans' obsession with local food), could Singapore noodles be seen as a foreign take on Singapore – just as Singapore has its own take on all other cultures?

To foreigners, Singapore's identity is rooted in its multicultural state. It is the convergence of diverse elements, forming something far greater than the sum of its parts. However, a real experience with Singapore's multiculturalism doesn't quite confirm to that image. Rather, Singaporeans exercise "selective multiculturalism". Perhaps a better way to explain this would be to draw the dichotomy between multiculturalism and the use of the phrase "melting pot". Multiculturalism is the mere presence of several cultures in a place, bare diversity. In contrast, a melting pot is somewhere where persons from different walks of life, cultures and traditions, converge, forming a new identity. Contrary to foreign opinion, and perhaps even against our own government's stand, Singapore is multicultural but not necessarily still a melting pot.

Singapore's multicultural demographic is unique because of her ancestry. While most countries can be traced back to one or two empires, Singapore is truly a *sui generis* country. The indigenous peoples in Singapore were predominantly of Malay heritage. This was later diluted by the influx of the Chinese and Indians in search of greener pastures and new fortune. Others came from the rest of the world with the draw of Singapore as a prime port in East Asia. Singapore became a home away from home for these hopefuls. Those who stayed

and built their lives here eventually formed the ancestry of the Singapore that we know and love today.

Upon independence, the government had to replace the colonial divide-and-rule model with a nation-building, united front for any progress to be made. Singapore has since prided itself as the hub of all hubs, but fundamentally, a cultural one. Singapore, with its diverse past, required a culture of acceptance and cohesion. While there are strong bonds within the community and a general lack of clashes due to ethnic or cultural differences and disagreements, these are based on tolerance rather than acceptance. For the longest time, Singaporeans were taught to be tolerant of the people around them, regardless of race, language or religion. They learned to tolerate practices that may seem foreign, and to tolerate dissimilarities. However, tolerance is a different creature from understanding and acceptance. Tolerance expires when pushed to the limit. Acceptance, on the other hand, hints at a notion of embracing the other. The culmination of a myriad of factors – low birth rates, high immigration, and level of globalisation, coupled with the inability to be self-sufficient and dependence on external markets (generally import-export heavy and capital markets) – brought a large influx of foreigners.

Still, while tolerance was promoted, other social policies shaped and facilitated interaction and understanding between races, ethnicities and religions. Consequently, Singaporeans were never particularly racist nor xenophobic, at least not overtly. It seems, however, that many Singaporeans today have forgotten that they themselves are descendants of immigrants. There seem to be a hierarchy now, rules as to being a Singaporean, and even different types of Singaporeans, making the Singaporean identity even more difficult to understand. Perhaps the current trend towards xenophobia stems

indirectly from the Singaporean identity, in addition to direct dilution of identity. Meritocracy is another cornerstone of the Singaporean identity and its nation-building efforts. However, meritocracy is a double-edged sword. The massive influx of foreigners in recent years has displaced many Singaporeans. At the top end, locals have been out-competed by the (supposedly) best and brightest from the region and the world. At the lower end, the large number of semi-skilled and unskilled foreign workers has allowed businesses to keep costs low and depress the wages of locals.

Of late, a growing number of Singaporeans are beginning to feel that foreigners have become too numerous and too close for comfort. Singapore has always been and still is a country for migrants. Proponents of high immigration in Singapore look to the demographic composition of global cities such as London and New York for support. From an economic standpoint, it is perhaps justifiable – Singapore lacks the necessary, let alone sufficient, natural resources to survive and thrive as an independent nation. But it relies too much on human resources from abroad, and risks diluting its sense of identity as a nation and people.

But what is the Singaporean identity? This question could be easily answered 10 years ago, though perhaps not so much today. While the multicultural narrative does and probably will continue to live on, at a fundamental level, Singapore needs to strike a balance between maintaining the Singaporean identity, and understanding the need to assimilate – or risk our multicultural brand. S Rajaratnam, born Ceylonese but also the author of the Singapore pledge, once noted that being a Singaporean is "not a matter of ancestry", but of "conviction and choice". The cornerstone of a Singaporean is not his birthplace, but his adaptation into and within Singapore's

society. In some ways, the Singaporean identity itself may be the ability to integrate.

Perhaps Singapore needs some form of cultural assurance, Asad Latif as Visiting Fellow to the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, alluded to. Singapore needs to relearn how to assimilate immigrants just as the USA and Australia have done – without worrying that the country's identity will be diluted. The key to this is to first evolve a strong sense of national identity. The paradox, however, may be that there is really no one true Singaporean identity; rather, there are things that bind us together. This might be why Singaporeans feel so strongly about their food.

English, Singlish, and Feelings about Home

Elizabeth Fong Lin

didn't hear or speak a word of Singlish until I was in Primary One, when my seatmate referred to us as *"churren"*.

I thought long and hard before asking the obvious: "You mean 'children'?"

She shook her head vigorously. "My tuition teacher say *churren*. Double confirm."

"But, there's an *l*. And a *d*."

"*Churren*."

I gave up.

My bewilderment at Singlish continued throughout my next 12 years of schooling. I didn't quite know how to feel about it – on the one hand, listening to it for prolonged periods of time made me slightly irritable, but on the other, there was, sometimes, no better way to get my point across. I suspect that my ambivalence was shared by many of my peers: at that point, the Speak Good English Movement ("SGEM")[1] was in full swing, following the whole *Phua Chu Kang* saga.[2] Some of my teachers were particularly enthusiastic about substituting all Singlish with Standard English,[3] and used the movement as justification for their attempts to stamp Singlish out for good. However, no one, as far as I could see, actually cared.

The theme for this first incarnation of the SGEM was "Speak Well. Be Understood." I privately felt that this was not at all a stirring exhortation, given that my initial unfamiliarity with Singlish seemed to be an aberration in a populace that breathed it. I found that speaking Singlish, especially when trailing my grandmother around the wet market, was far more likely to get me understood than speaking English.

Once, my school hosted a delegation of Japanese students. As a classmate and I were giving them a school tour, I overheard him boast that he knew at least six languages. I raised my eyebrows as he rattled off a string of them as proof: *"Jiak peng,*[4] *lack zai,*[5] *ah neh,*[6] *kantang,*[7] and Chinese and English, of course."

What a load of rubbish, I thought. You're just picking and choosing from the loanwords in Singlish.

That, essentially, is what Singlish is: a hodgepodge of disparate words stirred together in a massive pot. In the bustling, British port of Singapore, overrun by coolies, merchants, and hawkers from all around the region, it was inevitable that there would be cross-pollination between the languages spoken by each of them, or that there would be corruptions of English terms by dockhands, who rarely had the privilege of a formal – or English – education.[8]

However, despite the absurdity of my classmate's claim, I could hardly declare that the branches to different dialects that I'd picked up in Singlish weren't useful. The few Hokkien words I absorbed from Singlish help me communicate with Hokkien-speaking stallholders at hawker centres. The bastardised Malay I had acquired worked as a weak, but present launching point for me to learn Bahasa Indonesia. Singlish is the banana person's[9] teleportation pad around the immediate region. Going back to the theme of (Being) Understood, Singlish seemed to be getting the job done.

The theme for the third incarnation of the SGEM, however, bluntly conveyed the government's concerns. Titled "Be Understood". Not only in Singapore, Malaysia and Batam, the theme voiced the general sentiment that Singlish would be a hindrance to Singapore's economic success on an international level. Former Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew attributed Singapore's success to a proficiency in English coupled with the knowledge of a second language, as no other country in the region at the time used English as their language of commerce. Given that Singapore practised (and still practises) a policy of encouraging foreign investment, it is logical that the use of English gave (and still gives) Singapore a huge advantage. Thus, it seems that the most pressing problem that the

movement seeks to address is the *standard* of our Standard English, and the level of fluency that Singaporeans need to acquire in it in order to become actors on an international playing field.

Ironically, in order to get content across in an easily understandable way, many teachers use Singlish instead of English to teach their lessons. This creates a sort of habitual language vacuum in which students linger; they understand, instinctively, that they are not to use Singlish in a professional setting. However, it is unlikely that five hours of English lessons a week can undo the conditioning that results from the constant use of Singlish outside of (and, sometimes, even *during*) those classes.

In any case, languages in general seem to be taking a back seat to social emphasis on mathematics and the sciences: while both English and mother tongue are compulsory subjects, the number of students electing to take Literature in English as an O-'level subject is dwindling.[10] Literature in other languages is not offered at O-'level. Literature in Chinese, Malay, or Tamil may be taken at A-'level, but this post-secondary offering deprives those who choose not to go down the junior college track of learning literature in their mother tongue in a formal environment.

However, regardless of whether the SGEM succeeds in inculcating fluency in English in all Singaporeans, it is a truth universally acknowledged that Singlish is here to stay. It is part of us as individual Singaporeans: an extra nodule on our vocal chords that we access in social situations and in times of extreme excitement. It is a Creole born of our nation's history: a common thread amongst racially and religiously diverse peoples who historically had nothing in common but shared geographical space.

It is perhaps this commonality that makes it difficult for foreigners both within and without our island to understand us. Singaporeans use Singlish with such familiarity that we run the risk of becoming insular in our conversations – our inside jokes and phrases shut out visitors and settlers more effectively than immigration regulations. It is a common complaint that newcomers ought to learn English before coming here to work or settle, but it is likely that the complainants mean – either consciously or subconsciously – that the newcomers ought to learn *Singlish*. While English is our medium of communication with the outside world, it is Singlish that we speak amongst ourselves – a denominator separating the locals from the non-locals.

The uniqueness of Singlish has one other effect: when we are away and we hear Singlish, the overwhelming feeling is that of being home. We are but a very small people in a very large world. Singlish operates as a modified Marco Polo[11] when we are Singaporeans out of Singapore. Strangers become acquaintances (and friends?) with the use of *la* and *lor* – suffixes that turn formal discourse casual. Dropping prepositions has the effect of speaking in bullet points, resulting in rapid-fire banter. Here we are, two Singaporeans in the world that we communicate with in English, chatting away to each other over a cup of *kopi*[12] in Singlish.

Notes

1. The "Speak Good English Movement" is a government campaign launched in 2000 to encourage the learning and use of Standard English.
2. *Phua Chu Kang* was a sitcom that aired in the late 1990s to the early 2000s. The titular Phua Chu Kang was a contractor who spoke almost exclusively in exaggerated Singlish, and the comedy in his speech contributed greatly towards the sitcom's popularity. Unfortunately, as the show's popularity was attributed largely to how the Singlish dialogue made it relatable, there was a worry that the standard of Standard English was falling, and that Singlish was increasingly becoming the lingua franca of the day.
3. "Standard English" refers to grammatical, proper English as it is learned in schools. Any reference to English in this essay refers to Standard English.
4. *Jiak peng*: Hokkien for "eat rice".
5. *Lack zai*: Cantonese for "clever boy".
6. *Ah neh*: Tamil colloquialism for a waiter.
7. *Jiak kantang*: A Hokkien term for a westernised person. It is derived from a corruption of the Malay word "*kentang*", which means "potato", paired with *jiak*, a Hokkien word which means "eat".
8. For instance, the Singlish phrase "*gostan*" is a corruption of the nautical command "go astern", which means to go backward.
9. Banana person: Local lingo for a westernised person of Chinese descent – yellow on the outside, but white on the inside.
10. As of 2013, there were 3,000 students who elected to take Literature as an O-'level subject, as compared to 16,970 students in 1992.
11. Marco Polo: a game of tag played in a swimming pool where one player is designated "It". That player is blindfolded and attempts to tag the other players by shouting "Marco", to which other players must respond with "Polo". "It" must then locate the others with his sense of hearing.
12. *Kopi*: Malay/Hokkien word for coffee.

An Old Community with New Arrivals

Teo Shao Wei

I n 1819, Thomas Stamford Raffles signed a treaty with the Sultan of Johor on behalf of the British East India Company to develop Singapore as a British trading post. As news of the free port spread across the archipelago, immigrants flocked to the island. They included Armenian traders from Malacca, Java and Penang. Before long, Armenians were involved in the entrepôt trade of early Singapore. They primarily invested in real estate, established churches and diversified into law and business.

Today, the bustling city-state of Singapore is a melting pot of cultures, ethnicities, languages and religions – a reflection of its rich immigrant history. It is widely considered one of the world's most global cities and a role model for others. Beyond the trappings of modernity, such as skyscrapers and beautifully landscaped gardens, a walk down Singapore's civic district brings you back in time. In the midst of the busy civic district lies a place that is often regarded as a sanctuary and a welcome relief for city folks – the Armenian Apostolic Church of St Gregory the Illuminator.

Founded in 1835 with the support of 12 Armenian families, it is the oldest church building in Singapore. This British neoclassical structure features an octagonal cone supporting a small bell turret with Ionic columns, a stark contrast with the surrounding steel and glass structures that tend to characterise most modern skyscrapers. On 6 July 1973, in recognition of its significance to Singapore's history, the Armenian Church was gazetted as a national monument.

But before we delve deeper, perhaps a brief introduction is in order. Armenia is a mountainous country in the South Caucasus region of Eurasia. It is bordered by Turkey to the west, Georgia to the north, Azerbaijan to the east and Iran to the south. A former Soviet state, it is now a popular tourist destination. Rich in history and culture, it now welcomes flocks of

tourists to explore its ancient monasteries, churches, and forts, and enjoy the art and music scene.

The early Armenians in the 1800s in colonial Singapore were involved in import and export enterprises such as spices, textiles, commodities, and opium. By the late 1880s, the Armenians in Singapore numbered about 100 families. By then, many had moved beyond trading and went into practising law or hotel services. When World War II broke out, the local Armenian community, many of whom were British loyalists, were treated harshly. After the war, most of the community emigrated to Australia, USA or Britain. By the 1970s, the community had virtually disappeared; only a handful of the old families remained. With intermarriage and assimilation, the gradual demise of the community was inevitable.

Some notable Armenians in Singapore include Catchick Moses (Movessian) (1812–95), a co-founder of the *Straits Times*, the Sarkies brothers who were instrumental in founding Raffles Hotel, and Agnes Joaquim, after whom the national flower, the Vanda "Miss Joaquim" is named.

Recent Arrivals: One Story

In recent years, there has been a flow of Armenian expatriates from Armenia and Russia into Singapore. Wishing to find out more, I spoke to Gevorg Sargsyan, a conductor and cellist. His journey to Singapore is unusual. One day during the cold winter of Armenia, his wife, a prominent violinist, checked her junk mail and found an invitation for a fully paid trip to Singapore. Fed up with the terrible cold and intrigued by the exotic allure of the Far East, they packed their bags and came to Singapore.

Since then, Sargsyan had only returned home to Armenia once. He has sunk roots into Singapore. He is now the artistic

director of Artist Venture, and a conducting and cello teacher at Tanglewood Music School. In his capacity as a trustee of the Armenian Church, he and his fellow trustees and volunteers are doing their best to give it a new burst of life, by raising funds for renovations, increasing revenue by opening church premises for weddings, commercial filming, and professional photo shoots.

Cultural Contributions

Sargsyan pointed out that the one thing that is very different between Singapore and his home country is the concert culture. In Armenia, there is always a concert happening. Music is part and parcel of the life of the everyday man, and it cuts across all strata of society. In contrast, the concert culture in Singapore is not that strong. The perception here is that the arts and other 'cultural activities' are for the rich, and not something everyone can appreciate or enjoy.

Sargsyan tries to raise awareness and cultivate interest in art in the schools where he conducts, for example at Raffles Institution. He believes that it is important to cultivate the audience of tomorrow.

An Old Community Revived?

Many immigrants face the challenges of learning the local language and norms, never fully adapting to the new country. They primarily identify and associate themselves as coming from their home country. In addition, they face the perennial tension of blending into the mainstream culture while still keeping a distinct ethnic identity. Children of immigrants are influenced by the culture of their parents, but they often take on characteristics of the country that they are born in. This is

even more pronounced when they have minimal contact with their parent's country.

Sargsyan has a daughter who was born in Singapore in 2011. She has never been to Armenia and speaks English, and Chinese, with a smattering of Armenian. He laughed that despite her parents, she is completely local. She attends a national pre-school, celebrates local festivals, and socialises predominantly with Singaporeans. However, they retain some cultural quirks. Every Christmas is celebrated twice for the Sargsyan family – one on 25 December and one on 6 January, in accordance with Armenian traditions.

When I queried him on citizenship, he reflects a familiar sense of Singaporean-style pragmatism. He is considering getting a permanent residency (PR) because he wants his daughter to continue studying in national schools. He is full of praise for the Singapore's education system for it emphasises discipline, hard work and open inquiry. His motivations for obtaining citizenship are broadly reminiscent of our own forefathers.

But when pressed for an answer about what he likes most about Singapore, he was candid and genuine. "My friends, my memories," he beamed, replying without hesitation. To him, coming to Singapore means a commitment to blending in with the Singaporean fabric. In his words, "the better you interact, the better your life is."

As a trustee of the church, he and his fellow trustees work closely with the National Heritage Board and Professor Tommy Koh to preserve the culture and the way of life of Armenians here, as well as help newly arrived Armenians assimilate into Singapore's society. Unlike 'fresh immigrants' who often have to work to create a space that reflects their own culture, the Armenians already have various buildings and relics left by their ancestors. Although the two communities are separated by time, the old community have found a new breath of life

in the new, and the new have found a measure of refuge and familiarity with the old.

The new Armenian community also continues to carry on the old tradition of achieving great works incommensurate with their small numbers. Sargsyan is an example. Modern Singapore and modern Armenia do not have much in common, other than the fact that they are small states. However, perhaps due to this perceived 'deficiency', citizens from both states continue the tradition of striving towards greatness, achieving, building, and leaving behind a legacy that belies the size.

The new Armenian community today embodies the same spirit of the founding Armenians in Singapore – an open mind-edness to integration and assimilation, and the unwavering dedication to work with all people who are keen on Armenian issues and causes.

Before bidding goodbye, I looked once more at the tall spire on the Armenian Church's roof as well as the Roman Doric columns and pilasters that hold up the much lauded porticoes.

Coleman's masterpiece is a welcome relief for city folks who grow weary of the modern architecture that characterises Singapore's skyline today. The Armenian Church along Hill Street has a tranquil splendour and is a good reminder of our multi-cultural heritage and landscape.

While the Armenian Church is essentially the same as the one built in 1835 (with some minor restoration works in 1994), the Armenian community is an evolving one, just as the Singapore society is always changing with different waves of immigrants. Sargsyan's story is fascinating for it suggests that global changes can help revive a dying community. It is heart-ening to learn that, at least for one community in one country, globalisation can be a revitalising rather than homog-enising force.

Perennially Peranakan?

Sharon Wong Qiao Ling

W hat do Lee Kuan Yew, the *sarong kebaya*[1] and the *rempah udang*[2] have in common? Well, despite being an eclectic mix, they possess strong connections to the Peranakan culture.

Interest in the Peranakan culture has surged, thanks to Mediacorp's hit TV series *The Little Nyonya*. Peranakan-themed shops, eateries and even the museum have witnessed an increase in business following *The Little Nyonya's* success (Ong, 2009). Apart from the current craze, how much of the Peranakan culture do people really know?

Understanding the Peranakans: Origins and Decline

Literally translated, "*Peranakan*" is the Malay term for 'locally born'. The term "Peranakan" generally refers to the Peranakan Chinese. It has been used, however, to describe other communities, such as the Chitty Melaka and the Jawi Peranakans, which developed in Southeast Asia.

The Peranakan Chinese, also referred to as 'Straits Chinese', was a Chinese-Malay community that evolved as a hybrid local group that tended to marry within itself (Stoddart, 2011). The men were known as Babas while the women were known as Nyonyas (or Nonyas).

This community traces its roots back to Malacca in the fifteenth century, where their ancestors were thought to be foreign traders to the region who remained behind and married local women. Although their presence in Singapore and Penang only emerged later with the arrival of the British, the community was well-established by the first half of the nineteenth century (Stoddart, 2011).

Due to its unique, hybridised nature, the Peranakan culture is testimony to the amalgamation of disparate influences. A

separate language of their own evolved, "known as '*Baba Malay*,' a synthesis of Malay and Hokkien Chinese" (Stokes-Rees, 2013; Rudolf, 1998). Most famously, Nyonya cuisine combines the spices of the Malay and even Indian communities with Chinese ingredients, resulting in a vibrant medley of fusion food. Their distinctive material culture is also the product of this syncretism, which to this day draws from the traditions of both China and Southeast Asia (Stokes-Rees, 2013).

During the British colonial rule, the Peranakans in Singapore associated themselves with the British rulers and became influential as a result. They were often referred to as "the King's Chinese" due to their perceived loyalty to the British Crown (Stokes-Rees, 2013).

However, with the end of World War II and the onset of independence, first in Malaya and later in Singapore, the Peranakan culture seemed to decline (Stoddart, 2011). The community's political pre-eminence was eroded, leaving much ambiguity surrounding their position in society, with some even predicting the total collapse of their culture (Stokes-Rees, 2013).

Apart from the changing political circumstances, the perceived decline seizing the Peranakan culture could be partly attributed to their assimilation into the Chinese culture. Some *Baba*s underwent the process of resinification by learning Mandarin or their own ancestral dialect (Stokes-Rees, 2013), lessening the differences between the two groups. Chinese by descent, and absent the prominent external markers of Peranakan identity, such as the traditional *sarong kebaya* and *kasot manek*,[3] it was difficult to distinguish the indigenous Peranakans from members of the Chinese community.

Additionally, the advent and proliferation of the state narrative also eroded the distinctiveness associated with the Peranakans. The spread of English and Malay, for instance, saw

more non-Peranakan Chinese capable of speaking Malay. Later, governmental effort for Singaporean Chinese to learn Mandarin, despite Peranakan families being more likely to speak Malay at home, also contributed to the deterioration of the indigenous culture (Wee, 2000). The emphasis on the state narrative likewise promoted national identity over race, which makes members of the Peranakan community increasingly difficult to identify, since, unlike the colonial times, "Peranakan is not a [racial] category for the Singapore ID card."

Selling like Hot *Kueh*s: Revival of the Peranakan Culture

How, then, do we explain the revival of the Peranakan culture, rising like the metaphorical phoenix from the ashes? The exact reason for this revival has been the subject matter of dispute. Some ascribe this resurgence to TV sitcoms like *Sayang Sayang* while others associate it with theatre classics like *Emily of Emerald Hill*. Although the smatterings of TV series, plays and other initiatives have contributed to the rejuvenation of the Peranakan culture, it is undeniable that the biggest contribution was by MediaCorp's hit TV series *The Little Nyonya*, due to its easy accessibility (without requiring in-depth appreciation of arts and culture) and widespread reach to various audiences through free-to-air TV channels.

Locally Benjamin Seck, owner and chef of True Blue Cuisine, agrees that *The Little Nyonya* has created an unexpected surge of "new local customers." He remarked that although they had previously loaned the premises "to film some Channel 5 shows, but business did not improve so much." The Peranakan Museum has also observed "an increase in awareness of the Peranakan culture and has noticed more blog posts about

people's interest in the museum after they watched the show" (Ong, 2009).

Beyond Singapore shores, *The Little Nyonya* has also been a big hit with the international community. According to MediaCorp, the TV series have been topping the charts in Malaysia, on both Astro's AEC (cable) channel and ntv7's (free-to-air) drama belt. The series similarly enjoyed strong ratings when it aired in several cities including Shanghai, Xiamen and Guangxi, earning a nomination at the prestigious Magnolia Award 2010.

As the most watched serial for the past 15 years, *The Little Nyonya* was compared to popular Korean drama J*ewel in the Palace*, since both dramas showcase unique cultural aspects surrounding food and tradition. Incidentally, *The Little Nyonya* attracted unprecedented viewership in the Chinese cities, even surpassing the Korean series (Yang, 2010), piquing the interest of mainlanders in Peranakan food and culture (Chan, 2011).

Peranakan dishes, including *kueh pie tee*, *laksa* and curry chicken, were bestsellers at the Singapore pavilion at the Shanghai World Expo. Even fast-food chain KFC has launched "*Nonya* chicken wings" to cater to the masses (Peh, 2010). It appears that Peranakan culture has been rejuvenated in recent years, following the success of *The Little Nyonya*, but is this fever set to last?

Pera-makan: Preserving a Minority Culture

For this revitalisation to go beyond just a 'fad', much more needs to be done to create and sustain interest in the Peranakan culture, for instance, by providing answers and avenues for exploration. Many concerned stakeholders have consistently articulated the need to preserve this unique

hybridised culture that we could possibly call our own, lest it faces extinction. Business and museum owners stressed the need for the artefacts, food and fashion to serve as conduits for younger generations to find out more about Peranakan culture (Tang, 2014).

As Mr Edmund Wong, one of three brothers running Kim Choo Kueh Chang, a family business selling Nyonya rice dumplings, observed, "This culture belongs to us. If we don't embrace it, it'll be very sad indeed." (Tang, 2014)

From its genesis as an independent nation, Singapore has been defined more by its connections to the outside world than by place, language, or other defining elements (Stokes-Rees, 2013). It is in this light that the Peranakan culture, a seemingly organic heritage which developed from an amalgamation of influences, remains so pertinent and precious in our society, deserving of preservation and continuation.

Apart from talks, guided tours and Peranakan-inspired plays, it is perhaps the love of food, as a common denominator, that will draw people together in preserving this perhaps meaningfully and locally syncretic Singaporean culture. By moving past a post-multicultural mindset and understanding constructions of citizenship as multifaceted, even non-Peranakans can play a part to help maintain the unique Peranakan identity.

Before picking up a sundae next time, why not consider *ondeh ondeh*?

Notes

1. A traditional blouse-dress combination worn by the Nyonyas (Peranakan women), usually featuring a tubular batik skirt worn with a fitted blouse.
2. A savoury Nyonya dessert consisting of spicy dried shrimp stuffed in glutinous rice, wrapped in a banana leaf and grilled.
3. Peranakan beaded slippers, typically worn by a Nyonya to complete her *sarong kebaya* ensemble.

The Gurkhas:
Getting Ahead Abroad

Alana Mara Dresner

Colleen Patricia Powers

Mikihiko Tachi

Tristan Neo Wei Ler

Yusuke Saeki

Introduction

I magine, training your entire life for an opportunity to fight for another country, being so dedicated and hardworking that you would do anything, including kill for another country, and to only have one opportunity for a rich future. Imagine being a young Nepalese man hoping to be chosen to become a Gurkha.

Gurkhas in General

In Nepal, especially in the hill towns of the Himalayas, the people are destined for a life of peasantry and poverty. One way of escaping that bleak future is to become a Gurkha. To fulfill this dream, the Nepalese men must be willing to die for another country. Thousands of Nepalese each year compete to become a Gurkha. For these men, war is regarded as a sport, and they seem to have no fear of death. Because the Himalayan area is used to natural disasters, their society breeds fatalistic and tough men who would rather be shot and have their name live on as a hero than to stay at home or run away. The Gurkha's motto is "it's better to die than to be a coward" (Liang, 2012).

The day that a Gurkha-hopeful does not get chosen is one of great disappointment and shame for himself as well as his family. A few disappointed ones even choose not to go home and take their own life. The day a Nepalese man is selected to become a Gurkha is the best day of their lives, opening up new possibilities and opportunities (Liang, 2012).

The Gurkhas are soldiers from a Nepalese hill town in the Gorkha district. They are recruited to fill special roles in the Nepalese, British, Indian and Singapore army. When people

think of Gurkhas, they often associate them with the *khukuri*, a forward-curving Nepalese knife (Liang, 2012). As Prince Charles once said of them, the Gurkhas are the "bravest of the brave, most generous of the generous." If a Gurkha feels it is his duty is to kill a man, he will carry out without fear his mission. Thus, Gurkhas have a well-known reputation for their fearless military prowess. Sam Manekshaw former Indian Army Chief of Staff Field Marshal, once stated that "If a man says he is not afraid of dying, he is either lying or is a Gurkha."

Traditionally, recruitment had been only from the Nepali hill groups such as the Chhetri, Magar and Gurung. These three castes are the original Gurkhas who fought against the British during the Gurkha War (1814–16) between the Gorkha Kingdom in Nepal and the East India Company. Brahmin and Sherpa/ Tamang were not allowed to be recruited into the Gurkha army. Today Gurkhas are from all tribes of Nepal including Gurung, Magar, Chhetri, Rai, Limbu, Sherpa, Tamang, Newars, etc. Gurkhas were thought to be a martial race because they were considered to be naturally warlike and aggressive in battle; to possess qualities of courage, loyalty, self-sufficiency, physical strength, resilience, and orderliness; to be able to work hard for long periods of time; and to fight with tenacity and military strength. Their war cry was and is to this very day: "Jaya Mahakali, Ayo Gorkhali" (Glory to Great Kali, Gorkhas approach!) (MacDonald, 1991)

Gurkhas in Singapore

The Gurkhas first came to Singapore in 1949 when the British Indian Army sent them to Malaya and Singapore. Their presence as a neutral force was important when there were racial riots between the Malay and European communities. Not

belonging to any particular local ethnic group, they were seen as an unbiased force that could help maintain peace between the racial communities (Liang, Legacy of peace Forged by Pioneer Gurkhas, 2014).

Officially known as the Gurkha Contingent which is a line department in the Singapore Police Force, the contingent draws its members only from Nepal. They form a highly skilled, disciplined and dedicated guard force. After 9/11, as security concerns heightened, the Gurkhas were deployed to protect strategic installations on the island in addition to their other guard duties (Liang, 2014).

In Singapore, Gurkhas live in Mount Vernon Camp, a barricaded compound. Their wives and children stay in an adjacent compound where the children go to school. Wives are not allowed to take on jobs outside the compound. When they complete their term of service and retire, Gurkhas return to Nepal as they and their families cannot settle in Singapore (Tan, 2014).

To Singaporeans, Gurkhas are "visibly invisible". Singaporeans are familiar with the sight of Gurkhas as guards but do not feel any attachment to them. Gurkhas, on the other hand, express a strong attachment to Singapore. As a community, they have witnessed Singapore's transition from a colony to a first-world country. They have taken part in National Day parades. When asked, a retired Gurkha in Nepal would say he is proud to have served in Singapore (Tan, 2014).

The Gurkha contingent has been an important component of the Singapore Police Force for over six decades. They played a critical role in maintaining peace and order during the most tumultuous historical episodes in Singapore's history, including the Maria Hertogh riot in 1950 and the racial riots of 1964.

As a group, Gurkhas have contributed to peace and order in Singapore. As individuals, their lives and prospects in

Singapore are constrained in several ways. They cannot become Singapore citizens, and they and their families must leave Singapore after they retire. The pension they receive from Singapore is not inflation-adjusted and cannot be passed on to their wives after their death. As their wives are not permitted to do paid work in Singapore, they have little working experience that would help them get a job in Nepal. In consequence, a retired Gurkha and his family could face economic hardship in Nepal (Liang, 2013).

Their children may also have problems of their own. They cannot continue their studies in Singapore after their father's retirement. As one article reported, "Upon their return, many find themselves strangers in their own land and have a hard time adjusting to life in Nepal. They cannot read the Devnagari script and speak only broken Nepali, so continuing their education is challenging. Enlisting in the Gurkhas is not only a way to keep their forefathers' legacy alive, but also an escape from unemployment in a country where 46% of the population is without jobs" (Liang, 2013).

The story of Jana Rai, a 23-year-old Nepali born in Singapore in 1991 but now living in Brisbane, Australia, is poignant. Her father came as a Gurkha to Singapore in 1984. He married Jana's mother in 1990 and she joined him in Singapore the same year. Her younger brother too was born and raised in Singapore. Jana lived in Singapore for the first 20 years of her life but had to leave Singapore when her father retired. She completed her secondary education in Singapore and obtained a diploma in nursing in a local polytechnic. Though assimilated to life in Singapore and well-qualified, she was not allowed to seek work in Singapore. Born and bred in Singapore, Jana has a network of Singapore friends that she continues to be in touch with.

Jana cannot understand why mothers and wives are not permitted to work outside the Gurkha camp. She knows of aunties with postgraduate degrees and experienced nurses who are not allowed to work outside the camp. However, some Nepali wives can teach classes and give group tuition in the camp. They can also run small businesses in the camp.

Jana herself misses the place she called home for 20 years and the friendships she had forged in Singapore. She used to play floorball on her school team and had thought that she would have tried hard to be on the Singapore team if she had the opportunity to be a Singapore citizen. Jana says she can still sing Singapore's National Anthem. Her parents, she thought, could adjust to their return as they had grown up in Nepal. Fortunately, for Jana, there is a support system. Other Nepalese families have gone through or are going through the same adjustment and can help her.

Gurkha Contingents Abroad

Singapore is not the only country that recruits Gurkhas to serve in its armed forces. Gurkhas have been fighting in the British Army for over two centuries. The British East India Company was impressed by their courage and fighting skills when they invaded Nepal and persuaded the Gurkhas to enlist in its army. Since then, some 200,000 Gurkhas have fought alongside British army men (BBC, 2010).

When British colonies gained independence from the United Kingdom in the twentieth century, many of them decided to keep the Gurkhas in their armed forces. When India became independent in 1947, it signed with the UK a tripartite agreement with Nepal. Under the agreement, six Gurkha regiments were reassigned from the British Army to

the Indian Army. Malaysia followed this practice, incorporating the Gurkhas in its Royal Ranger Regiment in 1957 when it became independent. It is not only the ex-British colonies that have recruited Gurkhas. Gurkhas serve as guards at some American naval bases as well as in its embassy in Afghanistan (BBC, 2010).

The employment of Gurkhas has not been without controversy. Before 2007, Gurkhas were paid less than others who performed similar jobs; some were not given the right to settle in Britain after decades of service. The British government agreed under public pressure, in July 2007, to give equal pay and benefits Gurkhas and allow them and their relatives to reside in the UK after service. However, only Gurkhas from recent years are included in this new policy. A Gurkha Justice Campaign is pushing for the policy to be extended to all Gurkhas. There is much political support for their campaign. The leader of the Liberal Democrats in 2009 said extending benefits and rights to all Gurkhas was "the kind of thing people want this country to do" (BBC, 2010).

Conclusion

In Singapore, as in Britain and elsewhere where they have served, the Gurkhas have rendered a great service, keeping peace and order. Britain has changed its policy and now accords residency rights to recent cohorts of retired Gurkhas. Singapore has left unchanged its policy of requiring retiring Gurkhas to return to Nepal even as it allows large numbers of other Asians to settle. The reasons are not clear. One could be that Singapore does not give permanent residence or citizenship to unskilled foreign workers – such workers are expected to leave the island after completing their contract.

The Gurkhas and their families are different from unskilled workers in construction or domestic service. Many children of Gurkhas have been bred and educated in Singapore, with little experience of Nepal where their parents came from. Many Gurkha wives too have spent many years in Singapore and could assimilate well. It may be an opportune time to review current policy and extend residence rights, on a case-by-case basis, to qualified and educated Gurkhas who are proud of Singapore and will integrate well in a changing Singapore with persistent labour shortages.

PART 2

DIVERSITY

Marching and Giving Back

Kenny Quek Yu Wei

Introduction

I t does not take an astrophysicist to realise that a small state, like Singapore, is vulnerable. From warring states of ancient civilisations to modern-day warfare amongst countries, it was clear to then Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew that a strong defence force is essential for Singapore's survival. Without it, our security can easily be compromised.

Constrained by size – of both population and land mass – building a world-class defence force seemed to be an impossible feat. Yet, with the help of Israeli advisors, we were able to complete this formidable task. Today, the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) is considered the strongest and most advanced of the military forces in Southeast Asia (Barzilai, 2012).

However, many forget that while the world has helped us build our army, we have also used our army to contribute to the world. Apart from acting as a deterrence against invasions by hostile neighbours, having a strong army has allowed Singapore to become an active provider of humanitarian aid. For example, our army has taken part in numerous United Nations peacekeeping and disaster relief operations.

The World Helping Singapore Build its Army

In transforming Singapore's defence force into the third-generation SAF that we see today, much external help was brought in. Israeli advisors played the biggest role in laying the foundations for training up a strong and capable defence force. The British trained our pilots and many countries offered up their land as training grounds for the SAF. In an effort to take self-sustainability to an even higher level, talent was brought in to build a defence industry within Singapore.

Separation: On Our Own

When left to fend for ourselves with the sudden secession from Malaysia in 1965, Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew knew for sure that he had to build up Singapore's military defence force. At that time, all that Singapore had were the 1st and 2nd Singapore Infantry Regiments commanded by the British. With the impending withdrawal of the British forces on 31 December, 1971, Dr Goh Keng Swee, who later became Singapore's first Minister of Defence, was tasked with an extremely heavy responsibility by Prime Minister Lee: he was to build up the country's defence force, and do so quickly.

The Israeli Advisors: A Blessing in Disguise

Dr Goh's guiding principle was "to seek good advice" from those who had trodden the path (Tan, 2007), and the Israel Defence Force (IDF) naturally became the most suitable advisor. Israel had a strong army that defended the country well and accomplished plenty back home in a short span of time. Furthermore, being a small nation like Singapore, Israel had to face the similar struggles of being surrounded by occasionally unfriendly countries with predominantly Muslim populations. However, Prime Minister Lee only gave the IDF advisors the green light after India, Egypt, Switzerland and Britain replied to his letters for aid, declining to help Singapore to build its defence force (Lee, 2000). On hindsight, being rejected by the rest of the world seems like a blessing in disguise. It is still questionable if Singapore's sovereignty would have been compromised if these larger countries later refused to withdraw their troops after training had been completed. Requesting the withdrawal of a team of IDF advisors would have been (and was indeed) a much easier feat.

The Brown Book: Setting Strategies

Major General Rehavam Ze'evi, Deputy Head of Operations in the Israeli General Staff, was brought in and after performing his own "assessment of terrain" by travelling incognito in a taxi around the island, Ze'evi proposed his plans. His advice was to invest in training commanders by setting up an Officer Training School that would produce a committed corps of professional soldiers. The master plan for Singapore's defence – including military doctrines and strategies – was quickly collated and translated into English in what has become known as *The Brown Book* (Tan, 2007). Ze'evi's advice took root when Colonel Ya'akov "Jak" Elazari and his team of seven came to Singapore equipped with two suitcases containing 20 copies of *The Brown Book*. In less than a year, the construction of the Singapore Armed Forces Training Institute (SAFTI) was completed in the Pasir Laba area. About 200 commanders were trained, and creating a standing army on the basis of conscription became possible.

The Six-day War: The Identity of Our Advisors Revealed

The fears of the pioneer batch of 900 national servicemen in 1967 proved unfounded when food in the camps turned out to be plentiful and nutritious, and accommodation more than adequate. However, training under the IDF was tough and strenuous. To train a community of immigrants from all over Asia, whose mindsets were etched in merchant mentality and self-advancement, was not an easy feat. Yet, the IDF eventually filled the gap of a lack of a real tradition of soldiering and seafaring in Singapore, and military conscription went smoothly. During that period, Israel's victory over the Six-day War back

home, one of the swiftest and most decisive the world has ever seen, further strengthened the credibility of the Israeli advisors and hence the potential of the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) that they were training. Major General Israel Tal even proceeded to expound lessons learnt from the Six-day War to the top commanders of the SAF (Tan, 2007). This formed the basis of the SAF's strategy today: to seek a swift and decisive victory should deterrence fail.

The Six-day War also helped the IDF realise a surplus of tanks, and after consulting their advisors, Singapore purchased 72 AMX-13 light tanks from the IDF. These tanks came as a massive surprise to the nation and the Defence Minister of Malaysia when 30 of them rolled past them during the National Day Parade on 9 August, 1969. Efforts were, however, made to persuade the Malaysian government that Singapore's intentions were not hostile (Lee, 2000). With the foundations laid and doctrines expounded by the IDF, the SAF was definitely starting to show the region that it was a force to be reckoned with.

The British: Aid from Our Colonial Past

The next benefactors to Singapore's defence force were Singapore's British counterparts. After a huge overnight devaluation of the British pound costing S$157 million in sterling reserves that were earmarked for the purchase of new aeroplanes, Britain gave Singapore their entire radar defence system as a form of compensation (Tan, 2007). This was a huge asset to the defence force. Singapore lacked an aviation history and had been at the receiving end of Japanese aerial bombardment during World War II. Hence, Dr. Goh knew, for

a fact, that air defence was extremely important. Like a child in a candy store, when he set foot in the Paris Air Show with French Defence Ministry officials, he purchased a squadron of 20 Hawker Siddeley Hunters and hired 16 British Aerospace Strikemaster jet trainers. This set the stage for him to send 60 Singaporean pilot trainees for training in Britain. Finally, in 1968, the Singapore Air Defence Command (SADC), the predecessor of today's Republic of Singapore Air Force (RSAF), was established (Tan, 2007).

Size Constraints: Allocating Land to Economic and Military Development

While building military defence was vital to the survival of the nation, economic development was vital for the progress of the nation. Which, then, is more important? There was a limit to how much land could be allocated for military activities. Training grounds, airfields and ammunition depots took up large areas of land, and it became inevitable that the growing defence force had to be sent abroad for training – with the permission of benevolent neighbours. The defence minister decided to utilise large open spaces for tanks and artillery training in Australia and favourable terrain for infantry training in Taiwan. Singapore also has a good relationship with Brunei, founded upon a common strategic position that stemmed from being surrounded by larger countries that had demonstrated hostility to both countries in the past (Tan, 2011). This special political relationship allowed Singapore the opportunity to train its soldiers in the dense Bruneian jungles.

Chartered Industries of Singapore: Self-sustainability

When Singapore's economy took off, the next thing on the to-do list was to establish a defence industry in Singapore so as to increase its self-sustainability. Instead of importing equipment and small arms from other countries, manufacturing Singapore's own would reduce the military's dependence on foreign countries, giving Singapore more control over its defence force. In this endeavour, Sir Laurence Harnett, Director of Ordnance Production in the Australian Ministry of Munitions during the World War II, was called to the front line. As a retiring Managing Director of General Motors Holden, Sir Laurence Harnett was asked to set up Chartered Industries of Singapore (CIS), a government company specially commissioned to manufacture small arms for Singapore's defence industry (Tan, 2007). CIS progressed well and began to diversify and commercialise. After a series of acquisitions and restructurings, the Singapore Technologies (ST) group that we know today was formed, with over 50,000 employees and annual revenues of S$7.2 billion in 2001. The group's businesses spread across five main competencies – engineering, technology, infrastructure and lifestyle, property and financial services (Chua, 2011).

Singapore's Army in the World

While many countries played vital roles in building Singapore's defence force during its formative years, Singapore has also contributed to the world. As a prosperous nation, Singapore became a buyer of the latest military gadgets and assets from countries like the USA. CIS and ST today have also been

selling Singapore-designed weapons to foreign countries (Cutsoukis, 1989).

Foreign-policy Efforts: More than just Deterrence

As the SAF grew in size and military capacities, the government slowly moved the SAF away from a uni-dimensional reliance on its adopted Israeli model of pre-emptive deterrence to a more sophisticated multi-dimensional and integrated British model of using the military to increase its foreign policy efforts (Tan, 2011). Now, with armed forces capable of contributing to regional security, Singapore became a valuable regional ally for external powers. These relationships have increased Singapore's political standing and power in the region and on the global stage.

Peacetime Operations: Giving Back

In peacetime, the SAF is just as capable in responding to threats of terrorism and providing peacekeeping and humanitarian aid. When a massive tsunami hit Sumatra in 2004, the SAF was the first to reach the disaster site, even before the Indonesian forces. The Singapore Army's combat engineers built two beach landing points and seven helicopter landing sites in Meulaboh, Sumatra. The SAF Medical Corps treated 5,174 people at SAF field hospitals, and the Republic of Singapore Navy's (RSN) amphibious landing ships ferried supplies to those who needed them. RSAF Chinook and Super Puma helicopters flew 143 missions to the aid of many victims.

Strategic Alliances: Friends more than Foes

While building the nation's defence is critical for survival, building the nation's strategic alliances is important for progress. In an effort to deepen its relationship with the USA, Singapore helped sustain the US naval deployment from the Pacific to the Indian Ocean by giving the US Navy access to her naval bases. Singapore also supported the US-led global war on terror in 2003 by deploying 998 service personnel in Iraq (Tan, 2011). The close military and political relationship between both countries eventually led to the USA's first bilateral Free Trade Agreement with an Asian state in 2003.

Conclusion

In the last 50 years of Singapore's history, the country has progressed through many astonishing changes. However, one key aspect that has not and probably will never change is the importance that the government of Singapore places on military defence. Spending 3.6 percent of GDP annually on defence, the SAF has progressed well alongside the booming economy of Singapore. Singapore has transformed from a new, poverty-stricken country needing help from Israeli military advisors to a prosperous nation with a defence force that can punch above its weight, bolstering the country's foreign policy objectives. When looking at the third-generation SAF today, one of the most sophisticated and powerful armed forces in Southeast Asia, newer generations of Singaporeans have to always remember and appreciate the help that Singapore has received from other nations. All should continue to live in the spirit of helping others, so that the very weapons that the SAF purchases and trains with will never be put to use.

VIP Orchids and Soft Power

Teo Shao Wei

Colleen Powers

I t was 1972 when the then President of the USA, Richard's Nixon, made a landmark visit to China as the first American president to visit the PRC. To commemorate the occasion, two pandas were given to the National Zoo in Washington DC. Likewise, at the 2014 G20 meeting in Brisbane, various heads of state, including US President Barack Obama and Russian President Vladimir Putin, enjoyed marsupial (or koala) therapy, before engaging in official business.

From pouched mammals to cuddly pandas, countries engage in cultural diplomacy in order to further mutual understanding. Cultural diplomacy seeks to influence and foster mutual understanding between various parties through the exchange of art, ideas, and other aspects of culture. It reveals the soul of the nation and in turn enhances influence.

It enhances a country's soft power by getting others to admire its values. It also influences another's behaviour through co-optation rather than coercion. The world's military superpower, America, is a fine example of soft power, predominantly through its cultural exports such as films and music. The recently held Monocle Soft Power Survey 2014, ranked America #1, ahead of Germany and the United Kingdom.

China has pandas; Australia has Koalas; and America has Hollywood as its preferred vehicle of choice to engage in cultural diplomacy. What does Singapore use for cultural diplomacy? The answer is orchids!

So, what are orchids?

Orchidaceae, often called the orchid family, is a family of colourful and sometimes fragrant flowering plants that are extremely diverse. Orchids are well known and distinguished from other plants because they have a few defining characteristics: bilateral symmetry, resupinate flowers (upside down), small seeds, fused stamens and carpel. Orchids are readily

hybridised, and it is this characteristic that has drawn and attracted people from around the world to grow and nurture orchids.

History of Orchids in Singapore

Orchids have been a part of Singapore ever since the establishment of our Botanic Gardens in 1859.

In the mid-1870s, under Superintendent H. J. Murton, orchid species were cultivated in the Orchid House. Ever since then, the Botanic Gardens has exchanged orchid species with different areas of the world, increasing their collection.

When Henry Ridley became director of the Gardens in 1888, he built a new orchid house that was the perfect home for the orchids, allowing them to bloom more than they had in years past. Because of this success as well as the stable weather all year round, more species from around the world were introduced into the Botanic Gardens.

In 1893, Vanda "Miss Joaquim", the first orchid hybrid from Singapore, was successfully hybridised. It went on to become Singapore's national flower in 1981. It was a hybrid between *Vana hookeriana* and *Vana teres*, and was named after Agnes Joaquim because it originated in her garden.

The plant would soon grow in stature by winning a First Class Certificate at the London Royal Horticultural Show in 1897 and the first prize at the 1899 Flower Show in Singapore for the rarest orchid in the show.

In 1922, R. R. Holttum, the new assistant director, switched his focus to producing free-flowering orchid hybrids. This led to the development of the world-renowned special hybridisation programme. After a dismal lack of success, due to small seed size, a new method of asymbiotic orchid seed

germination was used to successfully create a breakthrough in the programme. The first hybrid in the Singapore Botanic Gardens' breeding programme was the *Spathoglottis Primrose*.

After this success, Holttum continued to produce more free-flowering orchid hybrids for lowland tropics. After a series of 'wild' crosses, he created a bigeneric hybrid, *Aranthera James Storie*, which was the first-ever registered intergeneric hybrid created by the gardens and remained a popular cut flower for many years.

The Orchid Industry: Singapore in the World; the World in Singapore

In the 1950s and 1960s, after many hybrids were produced and the programme grew more successful, some of the hybrids became basic materials for the new but growing orchid industry. Unlike the past, orchids now come in a variety of colours and shades, and even with the option of them being fragrant or not.

The orchid industry has a mass market around the world that ranges from selling seeds, to renting flowering orchids for landscape displays. Each market around the world prefers different colours and has different demands: for example, in the American market, people prefer stronger shades and contrasts. Mainly, the industry hybridised flowers to meet the demands of different people around the world and to make these flowers perfectly fit any customer's needs.

There are 153 orchid farms in Singapore and the orchid cut-flower industry contributes to the economy of Singapore. Singapore's success in the cut flower production is due to local interest in orchid hybridisation and Singapore's strategic location as a centre for air transport as well as the tireless efforts of the growers and exporters.

The Role of VIP Orchids

One of the most obvious uses of orchids for diplomacy is through presenting them to visiting dignitaries. Ever since the 1950s, the Government of Singapore has been presenting the Vanda "Miss Joaquim" to various state visitors and VIPs, honouring them, as well as to promote goodwill and closer ties.

However, for the truly extraordinary, Singapore has gone beyond merely presenting orchids, to specially breeding hybrids, and naming them after foreign celebrities, dignitaries, and heads of states. The tradition of naming a new species of orchids after a VIP began in 1956 with the flower, Aranthera Anne Black, which was named after Lady Anne Black, the wife of a former governor of Singapore. Other significant heads of states who have their own personal flowers include Indian prime minister Indira Gandhi, Japanese emperor Akihito, Philippines president Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, and US first lady Laura Bush. The British royal family holds the honour of having the most flowers named after them, from Queen Elizabeth II to Princess Diana, to William Catherine, Duchess of Cambridge.

According to Dr Kiat W. Tan, an NParks adviser, naming orchids after important guests helps immortalise their significant contributions in their respective fields.

This unique gesture of goodwill is an effective bridge for building bilateral ties. According to K. Kesavapany, Singapore's non-resident ambassador to Jordan, the orchid flower is an effective way to promote Singapore's relations with foreign countries as it is an everlasting token of friendship. Every year, as part of efforts to boost Singapore's image in Jordan, a flower stall is set up selling orchids flown over from Singapore. Amazingly, the flowers are in hot demand and are snapped up within a few hours. The proceeds of the sales are given to charity.

One story of how VIP orchids play an invaluable role in our island-nation's diplomacy comes from the reaction of Laura Bush when she was presented with a bouquet of orchids named after her. She said, "Oh, that's beautiful. I can't imagine anything nicer than having an orchid named after you." When her husband, US President George W. Bush sees the flowers, he would be reminded of Singapore's gift to his wife.

Botanic Gardens director Nigel Taylor observes that "every country wants to offer visiting dignitaries something and nowadays there are many more state visits". He suggests that naming orchids after VIPs would enhance Singapore's position as the gateway to Southeast Asia.

Being a small city-state, Singapore needs to develop many different ways to win friends. Economic success can catch the attention of the world as can its success in building a city in a garden. What better way is there to express friendship and goodwill than to cultivate something new under the sun, namely, a whole new genus of orchids for VIPs?

Meritocracy, Inequality and the Global War for Talent

Damien Chng

M eritocracy inevitably leads to inequality and too much meritocracy inevitably leads to too much inequality.

If we go back to the roots of the term "meritocracy" we discover that the term was used in a very different way. It was coined in 1958 by a British sociologist named Michael Young in a satirical novel titled "*The Rise of Meritocracy*". In that book, Young warned of the potential evils of a society that was arranged based on merit alone.

Since then, many have followed in Young's footsteps in arguing against a system where hierarchies are allocated based solely on merit alone. But at the same time, many governments around the world have taken it as a model on which to base their education system, and public service as well as the economy in general.

In Singapore, Donald Low has expressed the view that meritocracy is "as close as anything gets to being a national ideology". There is no doubt that our political leaders have affirmed its status as a foundational principle of governance time and time again.

But what exactly does being a meritocratic society mean?

At its most basic level, meritocracy calls for rewards to be allocated based on an individual achievements or merit. It focuses on ensuring that everyone has equal opportunity to enter the competition.

But that is also its fundamental weakness – it does not concern itself with the outcome. Strict adherence to meritocracy results in unequal outcomes. As Ben Bernanke has described it: "A meritocracy is a system in which the people who are the luckiest in their health and genetic endowment; luckiest in terms of family support, encouragement, and, probably, income; luckiest in their educational and career opportunities;

and luckiest in so many other ways difficult to enumerate –
these are the folks who reap the largest rewards."

In Singapore, merit is predominantly determined by a person's educational qualifications. This is explicitly supported by the government's education policy. Over the years, we have seen an introduction of different programmes that seeks to nurture "talented" children by giving them better opportunities and facilities to achieve academic excellence.

"Talent-spotting" begins as early as primary four, where children who do exceptionally well are placed in the "Gifted Education Programme", where they are sent to the best schools in Singapore. Once in the programme, the path towards the best universities is made that much easier.

There are three fundamental problems with such a system.

First, there is no certainty that our formal education system guarantees that we can identify all, or even most, of the "talented" individuals. The problem is that our measure of success – academic qualifications – is a very narrow one. Just because a person does well in school does not mean that he or she is intelligent; it may just be that the person is good at answering exam questions. Likewise, just because a person cannot answer exam questions does not mean that he or she is not intelligent.

The problem with our education system is that it assigns too much weight to an academic examination taken by a child at a very young age. In any case, how are we to be sure that a person's exam grades are accurate indicators of their intelligence?

And even then, how are we sure that intelligence is the only indicator of merit? Those who were directly or indirectly responsible for the 2008 economic crisis were, as commentators have pointed out, considered "elites". Yet that did not stop them from wreaking havoc on the livelihood of so many people.

Secondly, meritocracy inevitably breeds inequality. It is one thing to tolerate or perhaps even encourage a certain degree of inequality to encourage hard work; it is another altogether to allow it to grow into a chasm between rich and poor. The tendency of meritocracy is to entrench elitism. Those who make it to the top are in turn rewarded with more resources that they use to ensure that their children can do the same.

This creates a whole social class that allows for no one else but those who have done as well as those already in it. Evidence of this can easily be found within the Singaporean education system.

In 2011, a *Straits Times* report revealed that 50 percent of those in "elite" schools come from families with graduate fathers, while only 10 percent of those in neighbourhood schools share the same familial background. That same 50 percent from the elite schools will also have the best that our education system has to offer, such as smaller teacher-student ratios, and even access to the best universities both locally and internationally. Most of them will go on to have very successful and lucrative careers.

Another report showed that students in elite schools come from families that earn up to S$7100 per month on average. This is comparable with those from non-elite schools, whose families earn S$3560 per month on average.

While the intent of Singapore's meritocratic fundamentals may not be to entrench elitism, we can hardly turn a blind eye to the results. With a net spending on education that is lower than the OECD average, we can certainly do more to nurture the abilities of those who fall outside the "gifted" track.

Meritocracy has to be accompanied by broad-based affirmative-action programmes that allow as many as possible to start competing from roughly the same starting point.

Singapore's meritocratic system has also come under increasing strain from the global war for talent. Essentially, globalisation has brought the competition from talent to our shores. Analysts argue that the path to national prosperity lies in making a country more competitive globally by ensuring that the country is home to as many high-tech and high-skilled businesses as possible. In order to remain competitive, a country needs to recruit the world's best talent to fill these jobs. Where the local talent supply is insufficient, talent has to be imported from overseas. Countries are thus forced to tailor their policies to attract and retain these foreign talents. The world thus becomes a huge labour market place where countries and businesses compete with each other for talent. Because competition now takes on an international scale, meritocracy also goes global: people from any background or nationality are accepted as candidates for the job.

Singapore is no exception. In the past few years, we have seen our borders becoming more open to foreigners who come here to work, and compete in both the labour market, as well as the education system.

This has certain potential negative implications for our society.

First, increased competition has the potential to enhance inequality because it disproportionately affects the less wealthy. As highlighted above, those who come from wealthy families are likely to be those who are well equipped to handle the increased competition from overseas. While the import of talent into Singapore has increased, this has not been accompanied by an increase in educational support for those studying in the non-elite schools to deal with this competition. While spending on education may have risen over the years, the meritocratic assumption underlying this increased spending

remains fundamentally the same. Hence despite there being a ministerial level shift in rhetoric with regard to the non-elite schools, we nevertheless see an increased cynicism towards such messages. One only needs to recall the criticism directed by a principal of a non-elite school towards the government's "every school a good school" policy.

Secondly, globalisation has meant that the talents that have been nurtured in Singapore are no longer anchored here. These individuals have now greater access to the international job market, and are in turn more willing to leave Singapore for what they perceive as greener pastures overseas. We have now become more prone to losing talent at a quicker pace than ever. The temptation would be for us to use the very same strategy to poach the talent of other nations to replace what we have lost.

While this may be a reasonable course to sail, we have to make sure that we also provide the "non-elites" with the support that they need to compete. In fact, I would go as far as to argue that what we should be doing is to tap on this vast reserve of undeveloped talents. Instead of focusing on identifying talents through examinations and grades, we should be looking at ways in which we can identify ability through other non-conventional means. At the same time, we should not forget the vast strides that our education system has made. With the highest literacy rates in the world, as well as a reasonably good educational infrastructure, it would come as no surprise that a much larger number of students possess the potential to make it to the top. We should not ignore this group of students; we should, instead, provide them with the support that they need to develop to their fullest potential.

At the same time, we have to be very careful that our meritocratic system does not develop into one where there are

only successes or failures. Instead, what we should recognise is that each person can contribute to the development of our economy and society in very different ways. While the solution would not be to do away with competition altogether, we certainly need to make sure that those who are born at a disadvantage do not find themselves falling too far behind.

At the same time, we have to bear in mind that the outcomes are equally as important as the opportunities that are afforded to everyone. The equality of opportunity promoted by meritocracy cannot be taken as a substitute for a more egalitarian society. While inequality needs to be tolerated to a certain extent, allowing meritocracy to run its course could give rise to a system that not only entrenches the privileged of the wealthy and highly skilled, but also creates a gap so large that it would tear the fabric of our society.

Treating Drugs Softly?

Damien Chng

Alana Dresner

Alexandre Maillard

Singapore's drug problem began in the days of colonialism when the colonial government established an opium monopoly in 1910. After World War II, opium abuse was concentrated amongst the older population and the drug problem seemed to be on the decline. This soon changed when heroin hit the shores of Singapore – we had a full-blown epidemic on our hands and threw everything we had to try and solve the problem. Drug consumption has always been a criminal offence in Singapore. As soon as new, unprohibited drugs are brought in, they are quickly outlawed and subject to our notorious harsh penalties.

We think this strategy need not necessarily be the best option. Perhaps the time has come for us to talk about other strategies for dealing with the drug problem. Alana and Alexandre's encounter with marijuana in their schools tells us that it is not always the case that certain drugs are inherently harmful.

As a student at a prestigious university in America, Alana has an interesting perspective on the kinds of people who engage in drug use. Everyone at her school is incredibly qualified, as the university has strict requirements for gaining entry into its rigorous academic curriculum. That being said, it is not uncommon for students who perform well academically to consume drugs like marijuana recreationally or even habitually. This contradicts what society has envisioned as the quintessential drug user – the people on campus are driven, talented, and successful, and possess these qualities despite consuming drugs. Of course, we are conscious that her university is not necessarily representative of the entire population, so her experience and observations might differ a lot from someone who goes to a state university, where students come from more diverse backgrounds.

Generally, drug consumption in the USA is not frowned upon or viewed as detrimental unless it is consumed in excess.

However, this is a perspective that is mainly adopted by her generation. Older generations continue to view drugs as harmful and purposeless.

Aside from alcohol, marijuana is undoubtedly the most commonly used drug on college campuses. At a school as challenging as hers, she believes that the foremost reason students consume marijuana is because they want a means to relax after a long week of hard work.

France has experienced an increasing drug consumption rate in recent years, especially by people under 25 years old. As a result, politicians are forced to adapt to these changing mentalities in order to solve this social problem. For example, one of the most influential French political parties ('*Les Verts*') stated, in the 2012 presidential election, that it would legalisee marijuana if it won the presidency. Currently in France, cannabis is illegal although many do not get caught or prosecuted for consuming it.

In Alexandre's generation in France, people make a difference between marijuana, the most accessible and softest drug, and harder drugs; people generally consider marijuana a must-try experience. Figures released by *Le Figaro*, a famous French newspaper, show that 85 percent of French people between 17 and 25 have already smoked cannabis. Having lived abroad in the Caribbean and Australia for five years when he was younger, Alexandre realised that people from his generation, in France, tend to try and test the limits of the law and some do so by smoking marijuana.

In the French business school which Alexandre attends, most people who consume marijuana do it recreationally. They take it just to relax, or have a good time with friends, just as the American students do, and just as they would consume alcohol. From Alexandre's perspective, marijuana and alcohol should not be seen as harmful, so long as those

consuming them know not to get addicted. Indeed, the same principle can be applied to alcohol consumption, with the only difference being that alcohol can be readily purchased in stores. Moreover, Alexandre observes that smoking marijuana does not generally affect the ability of his schoolmates to study or work.

Alexandre's parents belong to the generation that has a really negative image of drugs. To them, consuming drugs represents isolation and lack of maturity. But social attitudes are changing and he believes that in upcoming years, marijuana will end up being legalised, or at least decriminalised, in France. Despite negative health effects in case of uncontrolled consumption, it would restrict the ability of organised criminal groups to profit from the trade, and would add one billion euros per year in fiscal revenue. These two factors are extremely relevant for current French politicians in a stagnating economy that faces increasing social problems.

Thus far, the dominant discourse on drugs in Singapore has been painted as a matter of national survival. This is not surprising considering the context in which Singapore's drug problem started. In 1975, Singapore experienced its first major drug problem – a sudden heroin "epidemic". Within two short years, up to 3 percent of the Singaporean male population was addicted to heroin. This number continued to rise, and, according to CNB figures, hit its peak in 1994.

From then on, the numbers have continued to fall, reaching an all-time low in 2005. Since 2005, however, the number of addicts arrested have increased, moderately bringing us back to where we were in the early 2000s. Recent statistics show that the number of young people who are turning to drugs is increasing. In 2013, 880 of the 1110 new abusers arrested were aged 20-29.

There is no doubt that drug abuse has the potential to wreak havoc on the lives of abusers and their loved ones. As far as possible, the abuse of drugs should be discouraged in Singaporean society. But that does not mean that Singapore should continue to treat drug addiction as a crime. International experience tells us that treating drug addiction as a health disorder allows for more effective measures to address the root of the problem.

It is time for Singaporeans to think about decriminalising drug possession or consumption. Any such course of action should, of course, be done incrementally. And perhaps marijuana should be the first to go, since it is the least harmful of the lot, and figures show that the number of abusers arrested for consuming it is rather low.

Decriminalisation will make it much easier for addicts to seek treatment and allows us to provide a better social support system for them to wean themselves off drugs, since they are no longer treated as criminals. Young abusers of decriminalised drugs will also not be given a criminal record. For persons trying to rebuild their lives, seeking employment will be that much easier without a black mark against their names. Of course, we need not completely legalise the consumption of drugs. Rather, it can continue to exist as an "administrative offence" punishable with a fine or mandatory community service that exists alongside all the other treatments available.

Furthermore, decriminalisation allows us to talk about drugs in a more mature and balanced manner. As a Singaporean student my entire life, I have been made to sit through various talks and lectures about drugs: how they ruin the lives of addicts and the people around them. There was no shortage of stories about how people died because of overdoses of drugs or families that were broken up. In Singapore, drug users are often painted as people who lack a proper moral

compass; they are irresponsible members of the family and society.

The UN Office of Drug and Crime highlights fundamental problems with the assumption that providing negative information about the dangers of drug abuse prevents drug use. It argues that the strategy of providing information in order to provoke emotional responses might just alienate recipients from any health-promotion messages.

Ultimately, we need to recognise that people can, and do, have the ability to resist going down the dark path of addiction. While working on this essay, I spoke to a local friend who personally knew recreational marijuana users in Singapore. It seems that the problem is not as uncommon as we think. Some university students (I'm not going to say who!) are even known to consume drugs on campus. But drug consumption is also not as bad as we imagine it to be. His friends lead perfectly normal lives and are not addicted to the substance at all. This is something echoed by Alana's and Alexandre's experiences in their respective countries.

But in order for people to refuse the path of addiction, they have to be empowered enough to say no. And perhaps in order to empower them, we need to sit down and talk about these issues in a reasonable manner. Of course we cannot not ignore the fact that there are definitely people out there who are unable to resist the temptation. But ignoring the health aspect of their problem and treating it as a crime is equally, if not more, harmful to them, since it drives them underground and discourages them from seeking the treatment that they need.

Of course, we have to admit that none of us are experts on drug or health policy. But at the very least, given our own experiences, there is a need for us to think about other ways to solve the drug addiction problem. While Singapore's "tough

on drugs" strategy may have worked thus far, there is no reason why other strategies will not work better. Nor is there reason for us to assume that the current approach will always remain effective. Perhaps the time has come for us to have this conversation, at the very least. It is only by doing so that we can truly discover if we are on the right path to solving the drug problem in Singapore.

'Finnishing' Schooling

Jannika Christine Andersson

Lu Hsueh-Hsin

Kevin Ng Boon Kiat

Introduction

I t has been said, "Education is the key to success in life." Despite the trend of motivational speeches claiming that many successful people either did badly or dropped out of school; and that grades are not the be all and end all of things, these words still ring true. Whether or not grades are a useful indicator of intelligence and predictor of success is a separate inquiry from the importance of an education.

An education, no matter what form it takes, is universally regarded as vital, so much so that the United Nations has classified it as a fundamental human right. A well-educated population will benefit the country in a variety of areas: economically, socially, etc. Any country, regardless of its stage of development, has a duty to ensure that its citizens are able to obtain a quality education. This is especially relevant as developing a successful knowledge-based economy is seen as the next economic frontier that every country is scrambling to conquer. This essay examines the education systems of Finland and Singapore, to discern the merits and difficulties that each system encounters, and discover lessons to be learned for the future. As a tribute to the Singapore educational system, each section has three supporting points.

A Comparative Look

Finland and Singapore share many similarities. They are both small countries, highly developed, and with roughly equivalent population sizes. Most pertinently, for the purposes of this essay, they are roughly equivalent in education standards. Recent results released by PISA indicated that Singapore and Finland came in 2nd and 12th place respectively out of 65

countries. However, the similarities end here, as the approaches to education are as different as night and day. The following areas are some examples of the differences between the two systems.

First, one of the most obvious differences is the lack of examinations. Finnish students have internal exams from the age of 10, but sit for their first national examination at the end of general upper secondary education, about the age of 19. Students in Singapore, unfortunately, suffer from exam stress as early as in their primary-school days, when they are about eight years old, and have to take their first national examination at the age of 12.

Second, Finnish schools have individualised, six-page development plans for each child. This plan is jointly signed by the parents and teachers, and reflects the emphasis placed on the parent-teacher partnership. Even the national curriculum explicitly states its aim to support families in their parenting tasks, one of which is educating the children of the family. In contrast, Singapore schools do not provide a formal, written, long-term development plan. The closest equivalent is a report card issued at the end of every semester, stating the student's academic grades and standing within their class and school. Furthermore, in Singapore over the last few years, there has been a constant public debate over the parent or teacher's responsibility for nurturing the child, especially since there is a common perception it is the teacher's job to teach.

Finally, Finnish education is characterised by the relatively low amount of stress, and private tuition being almost unheard of. When school ends, so do the lessons. However, education in Singapore is characterised by the highly stressful system and the fact then when school ends, other lessons, be it "enrichment" or tuition, begin.

Systemic Differences

Firstly, Finnish schools are generally autonomous. Due to the strict requirements to be a teacher, such as having the minimum educational standard of a master's degree, teachers are extremely well qualified. They are also generally fully trusted with the well-being of each student. On the other hand, the minimum qualification of teachers in Singapore varies depending on the subject taught, with some requiring O-'level certification. Singapore also has a centralised system, with many accountability measures put in place to ensure that teachers act responsibly. Likewise, almost all schools are government schools thus directives are issued from a centralised organisation – the Ministry of Education– and only certain schools enjoy a greater degree of autonomy, due to their autonomous school designation. Despite the gradual shift towards greater autonomy and diversity in schools, the presence of national, standardised examinations at ages 12, 16, and 18 prevent schools from having a large degree of autonomy in planning the curriculum.

Secondly, the educational culture is very different. Finnish students are graded from the fourth grade onwards, but the grade is seen as only a number and students are not compared with one another. More focus is put on why the student is either doing well or not, and how he or she can evolve educationally. Students have almost personal relationships with teachers to ensure that they can reach their personal goals. Furthermore, Finnish parents believe that all Finnish schools are equally good. This is in direct contrast to Singapore. From primary one, students are already graded and ranked within their class and school. Furthermore, the focus of parent-teacher conferences is almost always on the academic status of the student, and teachers usually change every one to two

years. The result is a more outcome-focused and impersonal system. Common public perception is that not all Singapore schools are equally good, thus there is great competition to enter certain high ranking school. Although there have been recent attempts to change public perception, such as the education minister having a vision of every school being a good school, this has yet to result in a significant change in public opinion.

Third, the cultural values are different. The Finnish emphasis on egalitarianism takes away the pressure and obsession to ensure that students "succeed" by obtaining top grades, allowing them to explore and learn. As such, students, no matter their standard, and even students with special needs, all study together in the same classroom. On the other hand, Singapore places a heavy emphasis on meritocracy. As such, there is a need to display merits, in the form of academic excellence, from a young age. This is fuelled by parents constantly rewarding their children if they do well, and punishing them if they do not. Also, societal commentary almost invariably takes the form of these equations.

1. Good results = clever = scholar/doctor/lawyer/etc. = success = earn big money
2. Poor results = stupid = road sweeper = failure = no money

Need for Reform?

Singapore students rank amongst the best in the world. However, we are often criticised for churning out students who are academically excellent but are one-dimensional. Students who go through the entire education process have their passion, creativity, and confidence extinguished. Some

have said that even the claim to academic excellence is arguable at best. It would seem as though Singapore's greatest claim to fame would be churning out a nation of outstanding test-takers.

The system is also inefficient. Every system, be it educational or work, requires a sorting mechanism to signal quality to people around them. Singapore is obsessed over such mechanisms, from PSLE to O-'level, and A-'level results, university GPA, and KPIs in the workforce. There is a constant need to benchmark ourselves amongst our peers. However, it is arguable whether standardised examinations should be the only benchmark. This phenomenon has resulted in a gross misallocation of resources. It is arguable that the amount spent is not justifiable, as the marginal cost far outweighs the marginal benefits. The single-minded focus on examinations above learning has transformed the Singaporean education system into a cramming ultramarathon, with more than S$1 billion annually spent on tuition alone.

Furthermore, there are issues about whether national examinations, especially at such tender ages, should be the sole determining factor for a child's future. It is often true that a student's progress in life is marked by the schools that he enters and the education he is given. No matter what is said about equal opportunity, it is clear that students who enter the "top schools" have a correspondingly greater chance of entering the "top university courses" and being selected for the "top jobs" and so enjoy "success" in life.

Whither Educational Reform

These comparisons are not new. Much ink has been spilt on this topic. However, there are still no solutions to this. Some

have called for a new prototype school, built from scratch, that can provide a genuine alternative to the existing system. Others have called for the adoption of Finnish practices, and some have defended the status quo. There are three main considerations that attention must be paid to.

First, each system has its own strength and weaknesses. Like top-performing businesses, Singapore seems to be a big believer in benchmarking against other successful nations. However, benchmarking does not mean that we should copy others exactly. It means that we compare, learn, and adapt with suitable modifications for our own purposes. Although the suggestion to adopt the Finnish approach is, at first blush, attractive, this is probably unfeasible. There is no point in adopting the surface features of the system if the underlying bedrock has not changed. As long as the public perception of education, its role, and what constitutes a "good education" does not change, a transplant of the foreign system is doomed from the beginning. It is possible that the cultural context would render transplantation virtually impossible.

Second, Singapore as a country is not ready to let go of our grip on standardised testing, competition and almost fanatical devotion to academic excellence. A good reason is because we do not see an urgent need for change. After all, the system works, and works brilliantly. The results speak for themselves, and are lauded internationally. While there are things we can definitely learn from the Finns, Singapore's PISA scores are ranked at the top of the pile, outscoring them in all areas. Objectively speaking, Singapore is much more successful. The inquiry, therefore, should not be focused on the adoption of a different system, but on questioning why the Singapore model is often decried while the Finnish one is lauded. Perhaps, the unease felt has nothing to do with the results produced,

but the price paid in exchange for the results obtained. After all, the claims of harshness, one-size-fit-all, creativity killing, high stress, and low happiness are neither unfounded nor one-off events. They are struggles that students have to grapple with.

Thirdly, various stakeholders are already reacting to these concerns. The best part of our globalised world is the free flow of information, both through the internet and through physical study missions. Officials in the MOE are cognisant of this. The recent half decade has seen a shift in the teaching, assessment and examination regime, trying to make the system gentler and recognising more areas of merit instead of only academic results. Alberta, California, is one example of a place that implemented steps Singapore can follow. It is a high PISA performer but also had one of the most tests in the world. Over the last 10 years, it has been building up teachers' skills and making other structural changes. This has allowed it to, just this year, replace the achievement tests with assessments that are administered by teachers with the goal of obtaining information about where students are struggling so they can intervene and help them succeed.

Conclusion

At the end of the day, it must be remembered that there cannot be reform just for reform's sake. Countries should take care in borrowing policies or practices from each other. Each will have its own successes, failures, and path of development. But each can learn from looking at and engaging with each other's successes and failures. Educational reform in Singapore needs to address an existing need, but paying attention to the country's societal culture. To succeed in Singapore, it must draw on our

greatest strengths, like drive, responsibility and valuing achieve-
ment, but tempering the competitiveness that contributes to
our achievement so that it does not destroy our ability to cir-
culate knowledge, develop our character and experience
happiness. After all, all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy.

Will Singapore Ever be Ready for Charlie Hebdo?

Nick Chiam Zhi Wen

"That a man be willing, when others are so too, as farre-forth, as for Peace, and defence of himself he shall think it necessary, to lay down this right to all things; and be contented with so much liberty against other men, as he would allow other men against himself."

– Hobbes (1651)

Déjà vu?

Can any society ever be ready for unfettered freedom of expression?

On 7 January, 2015, some 50 gunshots slammed into the offices of French satirical weekly magazine *Charlie Hebdo*, reportedly killing 11 people and wounding eleven others. The attack is now accepted to be a terrorist response to the publications of provocative and controversial caricatures of Prophet Muhammad. Yet, even in the aftermath, most of the European media (including the French) took the liberty to republish *Charlie Hebdo*'s front-page cover – which portrayed, inter alia, a crying Prophet Mohammed – on popular media networks. The cartoons again drew great flak from Muslims, who criticised the republications as offensive. But the publishing outlets jealously defended their rights to freedom of expression.

Unsurprisingly, Singapore wanted no part of the socio-political pandemonium. At the request of Singapore-based Times Printers, all locally distributed copies of *The Economist* omitted printing the image of the controversial cover page. This decision was later commended by Yaacob Ibrahim, Minister

for Communications and Information, who publicly declared that he appreciated *The Economist* for understanding the sensitivities involved. He remarked, pithily, that the government would have disallowed the cartoon to be circulated in Singapore *anyway*, because of "longstanding laws against causing offence to our races and religions". (Chua, 2006).

The world went full circle, returning squarely to the *Jyllands-Posten* Muhammad cartoons controversy in 2005. That year, a Danish newspaper published provocative caricatures of Prophet Muhammad, sparking violent protests in Muslim communities worldwide. Of course, Singapore characteristically refused to republish the ostensibly blasphemous and offensive caricatures. Prime Minister (PM) Lee Hsien Loong had this to say:

> *It's wrong, it's provocative. We would not have allowed it in Singapore … It was wrong for the Danish newspapers to publish the pictures, it was wrong for the other European newspapers to say, in solidarity, I will republish.*

Thus, almost a decade later, Singapore position remains exactly the same. All provocative foreign media, if antithetical to Singapore's ethos of racial and religious harmony, will be resisted with a great measure of political suspicion. Traditional news-media outlets are guarded jealously, consistent with the government's pre-emptive stance against external threats of religious harmony for fear of the social fabric tearing asunder, which informs its particularistic conception of freedom of expression in which religious harmony is more important than freedom of expression.

Secularism with a Soul

But racial and religious pluralism is not unique to Singapore. So why have racial and religious harmony become entrenched

as the socio-political "trump" in Singapore? Why is it that publishing anything which has a *mere tendency* to incite of feelings ill will, hostility, discontent, or even disaffection among the citizens and residents of Singapore as between different races or classes should potentially constitute a criminal offence?

From the outset, Singapore has long preferred a more communitarian view of the individual as a *member* of a community, with corresponding duties qua member towards the aggregate whole. Contrariwise, the European conception of fundamental liberties sees individuals generally as discrete and highly autonomous agents in society.

In a sense, therefore, it was a *deliberate political decision* that religion itself has been earmarked as a fault line of Singapore's polity, perhaps motivated by dint of racial and religious riots which plagued our initial days of independence. In fact, race and religion have been identified, pre-emptively, as the most *visceral and dangerous* fault line. In fact, "racial and religious harmony" has been embedded as one of five national Shared Values underpinning our fundamental national ideology. This is why, on 21 July every year, national schools in Singapore continue to commemorate Racial Harmony Day to imbibe in our young minds a sombre appreciation that race and religion subsist as dangerous societal fault-lines. Every year, we quietly appreciate the poignant reality that we have not seen brazen incidents of religious conflict in Singapore since independence some 50 years ago.

Nevertheless, Singapore is certainly not anti-religion. As far back as 1991, our *Shared Values White Paper* characterised religion as a "constructive social force, [as] long as those practising a religion give full respect to other faiths". Indeed, Singapore has been crowned the most religiously diverse nation of the 232 countries surveyed by the Pew Research Centre: in our tiny

island-nation comprising over five million people, 34 percent are Buddhist, 18 percent are Christian, 14 percent are Muslim, 5 percent are Hindi, less than 1 percent are Jewish whilst the remaining 16 percent are religiously unaffiliated.

Ultimately, Singapore appears to have struck a delicate balance by its celebrated model of stable religious pluralism: profoundly secular, yet profoundly religious, Singapore has been described as practising *secularism with a soul*.

It's Not Funny Anymore

But to some, Singapore's conservatism may appear to be old-fashioned.

In France, incumbent Prime Minister Manuel Valls recently urged upon the Parlement Français to continue to appreciate the distinction between one's right to "freedom of impertinence" and crimes like "apology for terrorism", "denial of the Holocaust", and racism. On this technical point, a French newspaper is thus free to mock Islam with impunity, but a comedian faces up to seven years in jail for sympathising with the *Charlie Hebdo* gunmen on Facebook.

In other words, one is prohibited from lambasting an identified group of persons (that is, discriminate), but is free to be *indiscriminate*; and after all, *Charlie Hebdo* had indiscriminately ridiculed even Christians and politicians!

Unfortunately, progressive as it may be, unbridled "impertinence" can be a ticking time bomb. Rising threats like the so-called Islamic State (ISIS) are now striving to exploit fractures within European society in order to pit people against each other. As French political scientist Professor Gilles Kepel believes, it was not mere coincidence that "integrated Muslims" were also victims of the *Charlie Hebdo* killings.

Therefore, Singapore's pre-emptive approach to identifying religion as a potential fault-line is impressively well ahead of its time. Religious pluralism is growing to become a global political conundrum, especially amidst the rising threat of trans-national terrorism and civil unrest inspired by separatist religious fundamentalism, both internally and externally.

In the post-9/11 reality, governments worldwide are struggling with the paradoxical choice between stultifying religion as a potential threat to social order, and preserving the integrity of their citizens' religious identities. Against this backdrop of extremist-Islamist terrorism as a "real, multifaceted, and strategic threat" by dint of Singapore's geo-political position in Southeast Asia, Singapore has been vigilant for the longest time.

Temper Moral Panic

Sadly, the inconvenient truth is that religious harmony cannot be legislated. Hard laws are reactive, and cannot by themselves make a Singapore more tolerant or open society.

It is therefore imperative that policy-makers avoid straining ethnic relations by introducing moral panic into public discourse: governments cannot *ostensibly* conflate Islamic religiosity with the susceptibility to terrorism. Otherwise, aggressive policing and draconian laws may become unduly alarmist, potentially causing communities to view each other antagonistically. To be sure, the local crackdown on the Jemaah Islamiyah network and suspected home- grown terrorists between 2001 and 2004 had already unnerved many Singaporeans.

Ultimately, thoughtless reliance on coercive legislation is going to be woefully inadequate.

Furthermore, if religion as a fault-line is to be taken seriously, then disputes of high controversy must somehow be *taken offline*. Feeding public vitriol is surely destructive. Thankfully, Singapore appears to be moving towards a softer, more community-based approach. We saw this in 2010, when three youths found themselves arrested for publishing manifestly racist sentiments on Facebook. The trio were quietly enrolled in a "guidance programme" conducted by the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports (now restructured as the Ministry of Social and Family Development). They were never convicted as criminals. Popular media quickly moved on.

Similarly, religious organisations like the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore (MUIS) have increasingly important roles to play in nurturing genuine consensus. For instance, MUIS has been proactive in "*reaffirming the validity* of key principles in the Singapore Muslim identity" by publishing confidence-building statements and denouncing the acts of radical Islamic groups. In so doing, MUIS properly characterises terrorism as a "national problem" and not provocatively as a "Malay-Muslim problem". The continuing corrective effect of these statements on public sentiment cannot be underestimated.

Je suis Singapourien

Quite recently, Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew again reminded Singapore of the pertinence of solidarity and cohesion amongst various religious groups. He urged us never to forget "what being a *Singaporean* means". Beyond merely tolerating other groups, we are to "[open] our hearts to all our fellow citizens".

Thus, the most remarkable aspect of Singapore's brand of secularism is that there is *no need* for a Singaporean to choose

between being Singaporean, and his or her own religious ideals. This is why Singapore will never be ready for *Charlie Hebdo*.

Je suis Singapourien!

Taking Creativity Seriously

Priscilla Chia

Introduction

The Singapore, which we inhabit today, is a vastly different place from the one I grew up in. Growing up as a 1990s child, I have always been impressed upon by both my parents, my educators of the need to develop technical skills (as we understood them - mathematics and science). Arts and the humanities (which I loved and adored) were considered second- and sometimes third-tier subjects less worthy of intellectual and academic pursuit. *"Girl ah, you grow up be teacher ah? How to earn money like that? Cannot, lah"* - my mother would fret over my mediocre grades for mathematics and science. *"But I got As for my history and geography, leh"* I would protest, only to be met, to my utter dismay, with her complete ambivalence.

In today's context, with the establishment of institutions such as the School of the Arts and Mediapolis, opinions on the value of the arts and humanities have certainly shifted. In the early 2000s, recognising that the investment-led economic strategy might be rendered increasingly otiose in a global economy driven by knowledge and human capital, the government geared its economic plans towards developing Singapore into a global creative hub. Specifically, the government identified the need to strengthen the nation's capabilities in three main areas: the arts and culture, the media industry, and the design industry in order to develop Singapore's creative economy and propel us forward, towards the next phase of economic growth.

While this shift towards nurturing Singapore as a global creative hub invigorates many exciting promises and prospects for us, the sceptic in me harbours some reservations as to its potential.

Engineering Creativity

As a starting point of analysis, much of the government's efforts have been directed towards building the necessary infrastructures, as well as in promoting and marketing Singapore as a creative and vibrant city in order to attract international investments. With the likes of key players in the global creative industry such as Lucas Films and Electronic Arts setting up their offices here in Singapore, the government has, in this regard, been especially successful and there is little doubt that Singapore will continue to draw in such high-value investments.

But are we valuing creativity for all the wrong reasons? It appears to me that creativity has been valued largely for its economic ability to harness economic ends, rather than for its intrinsic and humanistic worth. In essence, the government has taken a narrow and less-than-holistic understanding of creativity by primarily focusing on its commercial viability. In this sense, there is an air of artificiality in how the government constructs its version of the creative economy. Academic Terence Lee, for instance, argues that the focus of rebranding Singapore as a creativity city is merely for the government to appear to be doing something to keep up with global trends in the cultural and media industries, rather than reflecting any substantive changes. The depth of his criticism engages the substance and form debate – a global creativity city cannot be "built" by the mere ramping up of the "hardware" (infrastructures) with little concern for the "software" (human capital and local talent).

Although there are some efforts towards enhancing the "software" of Singapore, such efforts stand in stark contrast to the emphasis placed on enhancing the commercial sector of the creative economy. Furthermore, nurturing the creative

human capital requires an environment that is open and accepting of diversity and alternative voices. Ostensibly, the demands of cultivating a creative economy run contrary to the socio- political realities of Singapore.

It is not controversial to assert that the government retains relatively tight control and policing over its citizens' freedom of expression. Matters pertaining to religion and race are considered out of bounds for discussion. Stringent censorship controls remains. Commentaries or artistic forms that could potentially undermine the government's credibility are muzzled. The presence of invisible "OB-markers" looms ominously overhead, like the Sword of Damocles. Local artists often find themselves having to contend and navigate within the little nooks and spaces that the government is comfortable with. Such controls have been justified on the basis of Singapore's vulnerability and exercised in the name of ensuring social harmony and stability.

In the broader picture, however, the lack of openness presents itself as an obstacle towards the vision of Singapore as a global creative hub. After all, the flourishing of ideas, expressions and creativity knows no boundaries. Addressing this aspect requires loosening social and political controls, which might not sit well with a government known for its "soft authoritarianism" and penchant for economic pragmatism.

No doubt, at present we are beginning to witness a shift towards more open forms of governmentality. It is, however, unlikely that the humanistic element of creativity would gain much traction in the near future. There are simply too little economic imperatives to do so. And especially so because the kind of international investments the government wishes to attract are rarely concerned with producing works touching upon our local cultural, social and political issues.

Quintessentially, we might merely be "building" an artificial construct of a global creativity city – without the kind of dynamism, sophistication and artistic vibes that creative cities such as Paris and New York naturally exudes.

Why it Matters

At the end of the day, what ignites a creative city is the passion and imagination of its citizens – not the multi-million dollar infrastructures that are ultimately inanimate and soulless. More fundamentally, beyond all the grandeur and allure, a "commercialised" creative city promises, are we valuing creativity for the right reasons, for whose sake and for what purposes?

Creative industries do not merely churn out economic digits, but have the capacity to bring about meaningful social and cultural effects. But this can only be achieved if we approach creativity from cultural and artistic viewpoints that are uninhibited by economic shackles. The role of the arts and culture, for instance, has the transformative value of forging our national identity, and participation in the arts helps deepen community development and cohesion. When our first Culture Minister S. Rajaratnam was asked to prioritise between houses, schools, jobs and hospitals, or music, painting, literature, and drama, he replied:

This is the sort of question that is asked in societies which are spiritually and intellectually sick. Such a question comes naturally only in a society, which has become less human and almost animal in character. It is only in animal societies that its members are preoccupied with the essentials of life … a society which concentrated only on these essentials … would be no better than a society of monkeys, sheep or ants.

An uncompromising focus on the commercial is a missed opportunity to create meaning and value. Equally, expecting

the commercial arms of the creative economy to flex its muscles, without understanding how it interacts and is influenced by its intrinsic and humanistic counterparts, inevitably limits our creative potential.

There is, of course, a delicate balance that needs to be calibrated and drawn between the economical and the humanistic. But moving forward, Singapore can hardly afford to globalise on its own "creative" terms that only look at the economics of it all.

Should Casinos Have a Conscience?

Seah Kah Teik

Elgin Seah Hong Wee

Sushawn Nag

Alexandre Luc Mallard

Vikram Kandeth

Introduction

An "integrated resort" is a term coined by Singapore to describe a cluster of entertainment and leisure facilities, ranging from shopping malls to amusement parks, and catering to a varied clientele. Singapore itself is home to two of them: Resorts World Sentosa and the Marina Bay Sands Resort. Yet, despite the many attractions and events held in the resorts since their opening, they are still most known for their casinos. While the other attractions in the integrated resorts contribute greatly in generating tourism revenue, it has been suggested that the presence of casinos allows vices such as gambling to flourish. While it may be true that the main aim of casinos is to draw people in to wager money in games of chance and that the accessibility of the casinos may entice citizens to visit, measures have been put in place to prevent the average Singaporean from falling prey to the consequences of gambling such as addiction to the vice, indebtedness or bankruptcy.

While bids for the construction of a casino had been tabled in parliament before, it was only in 2004 that such a proposal was approved for action after much deliberation and open parliamentary debate. However, the green light for the establishment of the integrated resort came with a slew of regulations designed to ensure that the more untoward consequences of having an accessible casino would not touch the local population. Such regulations governing casinos largely differed from those found in other countries and cities like Las Vegas, Nevada and Macau. This was also because the aims of the governing bodies through the regulations were largely different.

Tourism in Singapore's Economy

Tourism plays an important role in Singapore's economy. In 2013, 15.6 million tourists visited Singapore, generating record receipts of S$23.5 billion for the country (STB, 2014). This windfall is partially due to Singapore's geographical location. Nestled in Southeast Asia, Singapore is close to China and India, two of the world's most populous and increasingly wealthy nations. Furthermore, it is located between Europe and Australia, and is seen as a stepping stone to the rest of Asia. Moreover, Singapore blends Chinese, Arab, Malay, Indian and western cultures to create a unique tapestry. The diversity of Singapore's social fabric, coupled with the fact that English is the main medium of communication, makes Singapore an attractive destination for English-speaking tourists. Furthermore, the tourism industry has also grown due to the work undertaken by the Singapore Tourism Board in order to promote Singapore as a unique holiday destination.

Singapore's efficient infrastructure also makes it an attractive place to visit, as the public transportation system makes traversing the country easy. For instance, Singapore's network of railways, the Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) system, is both reliable and safe, providing tourists with an option to travel around the island quickly and cheaply.

Furthermore, Singapore has invested in the construction of tourist attractions such as the Singapore Zoo, Jurong Bird Park, and the Singapore Flyer. Taken in conjunction with the Orchard Road shopping district and the watering holes at Clarke Quay, Singapore has something for everyone.

In 2014, the arrival of tourists decreased by 3 percent (15.6 million in 2013, 15.1 million in 2014). However, the receipts from tourism remained largely the same, at S$23.5 billion. This

means that visitors spent more during their stays, which were also for longer periods of time than before (Singapore Tourism Board, 2014).

The Decision

The national debate on the Integrated Resorts (IR) in 2004 mirrored the first discussions on the wisdom of opening a casino in Singapore in 1985, the year the nation had its first post-independence recession. Although the idea was scrapped by then Deputy Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong, the proposal never left the table. In 2002, the Economic Review Committee chaired by prominent banker Wee Ee-Chao once again recommended that casinos be included in Singapore's new economic plan. Then Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong turned down the proposal, cautioning that the economic merits were unable to match the social impacts that would befall society and that casinos could glamorise and encourage gambling addiction.

In 2004, the proposal was raised again – and it was approved. Three major developments made the government willing to reconsider its stand. First, Singapore was losing ground in tourism. Its tourist market share was declining and visitors were making shorter visits. Secondly, cities around the world were reinventing themselves by building more attractions and making themselves more attractive to tourists, creating stiffer competition for Singapore. Singapore was lagging behind, with feedback received from visitors that Singapore was "unexciting". Other cities had attractions such as amusement parks, glamorous casinos, and beautiful or unique architecture. In comparison, it was suggested that Singapore lacked the "X-factor", setting it apart from its neighbours. The

government felt it had to do something to ensure that the country remained attractive to tourists. Lastly, the government had to dispel the popular belief that casinos were the only attractions planned. It had to convince the public that "integrated resorts" were going to be built instead – leisure, entertainment and business zones that would have a variety of amenities such as museums, theme parks, hotels and convention space. This was to ensure that although the casino, might be the main draw for revenue, it would not be the only thing facility that people would associate with the resorts.

There was some degree of social backlash against the decision to construct an integrated resort housing a casino from religious groups, social workers and voluntary welfare organisations. However, in April 2005, having acknowledged both the benefits and detriments that the IRs could bring about, the government decided to go ahead with the plan to build not one, but two IRs. Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong (2005) was quoted as saying, "As Prime Minister, I carry the ultimate responsibility for the decision." The Ministry of Trade and Industry estimated that the IRs would create 35,000 jobs in hospitality and related sectors. The government also introduced a myriad of policies to ensure that the social impact that the IRs would have on the population would be minimised. This included the establishment of a new government statutory board, the Casino Regulatory Authority, as well as the National Council on Problem Gambling. Measures were also put in place to restrict cash-tight locals from gambling at the casinos through a system of exclusion as well as levying an entrance toll for locals as proof of their credit-worthiness. In imposing these regulations, the government intended to protect the social fabric of Singapore by keeping it clean of criminal influence and activity. To date, the government has managed

to preserve the integrity of the society while allowing the IRs to flourish and become some of the world's most profitable casinos within three years of the IRs' opening (Reuters, 2013).

Integrated Resorts: Resorts World Sentosa and Marina Bay Sands

The developers of the integrated resorts were decided in a bidding process where organisations submitted their bids and proposals. After a procedure of accepting and evaluating proposals from around the world, two bids emerged as victors. These were Las Vegas Sands (LVS) for the Marina Bay site and the Genting Group for the Sentosa site. The various bids were evaluated on various factors including tourism appeal, architectural design, development investment, and track record of the developer.

Marina Bay Sands

After the land price was set at S$1.2 billion in late 2005, LVS was awarded building rights in May 2006 with an investment value of S$3.85 billion. Although construction began, LVS faced severe difficulties amid the 2008 global financial crisis. During this period the firm's shares fell in value by more than 90 percent and the company came close to bankruptcy several times. The completion of the project was also jeopardised by LVS's inability to acquire debt financing. Furthermore, other factors such as rising concrete prices, labour shortages and high rainfall put further pressure on LVS. LVS overcame this obstacle by suspending its other on-going projects in order to funnel its financial resources towards the completion of the Marina Bay IR. To alleviate the financial pressure it was under, the

firm raised S$3.2 billion through a stock offering, to which LVS CEO Sheldon Adelson contributed S$1 billion.

Despite troubles along the way, Marina Bay Sands finally proceeded with its soft opening in April of 2010, with an official launch on 23 June. The project almost immediately became an overwhelming success, generating a great deal of revenue for LVS. The profits for the first quarter were S$315 million on S$631 million of revenue. This rose to profits of S$390 million on just S$560 million of revenue in the following quarter. In its first year, Marina Bay Sands hosted nearly 20 million visitors and 2,000 meetings. With its proximity to downtown and exhibition and conference facilities, Marina Bay Sands caters towards a business demographic. The integrated resort features more than 2,000 luxury rooms and suites, a mall, a casino, world-class dining and entertainment venues. The Sky Park connecting the three 55-storey towers has gardens, an observatory deck, a restaurant, bar and a 150m infinity pool overlooking the city (Your Singapore, 2013). Yet, even beyond financial terms, Marina Bay Sands has been a success story for Singapore in stimulating its tourism sector. Marina Bay Sands now has an iconic place in Singapore's skyline and is globally recognisable.

Resorts World Sentosa

Resorts World Sentosa was developed on a timeline similar to Marina Bay Sands, opening just a few months before Marina Bay Sands did in 2010. This development is a much larger project undertaken by the Genting Group. Resorts World Sentosa, being located off the main island, houses more on-site attractions than Marina Bay Sands and is marketed towards families and tourists. The 49 acres consist of six different hotels, restaurants including those run by celebrity chefs, retail outlets,

a spa, entertainment venues and a casino. The on-site attractions include Universal Studios, the S.E.A. Aquarium, Adventure Cove waterpark, and Maritime Experiential Museum. Although it does not cast a silhouette in Singapore's skyline, Resorts World Sentosa makes for an ideal holiday in Singapore due to this plethora of activities, accommodation and dining.

Regulating Casinos: The Singapore Way

The Casino Regulatory Authority (CRA) and the National Council on Problem Gambling (NCPG) were established in order to guard against any negative social impacts that the opening of casinos might create. The CRA is charged with operating the Casino Control Act that was legislated and enacted in 2006 (AGC, 2007). The Act exercises regulatory oversight of the two casinos and ensures that they adheres to guidelines that would not potentially corrupt the social fabric of the nation. The Act also controls the licensing of the casinos, permitted games and games equipment, and delineates the scope of the CRA's powers to investigate into any infractions carried out by the casinos. The CRA imposes a casino levy on Singaporeans who wish to visit the casinos. This levy of S$100 per entry or S$2000 per annum which is only applicable to citizens and permanent residents, is aimed at deterring cash-strapped locals from spending money on games of chance. It also has the added effect of ensuring that the main clientele of the casinos are tourists.

The NCPG deals more with the citizens than the casinos, though they are conferred some regulatory powers via the Casino Control Act. The NCPG acts as a counselling service for people who identify themselves, or are identified by loved ones, as problem gamblers. They may opt for a casino exclusion order, which bars them from entering either casino in

Singapore. The exclusion order is enforced by the security of each casino and is strictly adhered to. Casinos may be fined for allowing someone under an exclusion order to enter the casino. The NCPG also advises the Ministry of Social and Family Development on social issues and concerns that pertain to, or are ancillary to, the casinos. This helps with greater enforcement for preventing the rise of negative social impacts that may arise from the casinos. While other countries regulate their casinos, they do so at different levels and with different aims in mind.

Regulating Casinos: The Las Vegas Appraoch

In the USA, gambling is legal but is subject to some restrictions. The regulatory body governing the operation of casinos is the American Gaming Association (AGA). The AGA provides data on gaming in the various states, but does not regulate the daily operations of gaming centres nation-wide, leaving such authority to the states. This essay considers the city that is synonymous with casinos, Las Vegas located in Nevada, and the state governing body, the Nevada Gaming Control Board (NGCB).

The NGCB plays a role largely similar to Singapore's CRA. It exercises oversight of the operation of casinos in the state, mostly found in the city of Las Vegas. Like the CRA, it handles the licensing of casinos and delineate permitted games. However, a stark difference between the two authorities is the inclusion of an exclusion provision in the CRA. Unlike Singapore, the state of Nevada only issues an exclusion order if a person has a reputation of criminal gambling behaviour. This exclusion order appears to be punitive rather than for the purpose

of social welfare. There is a council that focuses on problem gambling: the Nevada Council on Problem Gambling. However, unlike the NCPG of Singapore, it is not given any regulatory powers and exists as a non-profit organisation that helps to rehabilitate problem gamblers.

Regulating Casinos: The Macau Method

Macau's gaming industry goes back to the sixteenth century, when Chinese workers immigrated to Macau. With no regulations on gaming, street gaming began to gain popularity and flourish. The gaming industry grew rapidly in Macau after it was legalised in 1847, and the government soon began collecting gaming taxes that would become the main source of revenue for the government by the late nineteenth century. Before long, it had gained a reputation as the "*Monte Carlo of the Orient*" (DICJ, 2015). Today, Macau occasionally out-profits the Las Vegas strip in clinching the title as the largest gaming city worldwide.

Gambling has always been illegal under Chinese law, and although Macau's sovereignty was eventually transferred to China in 1999, the Sino-Portuguese Joint Declaration and the Basic Law of Macau stipulated that Macau would maintain its own legal system which enshrined the exception for legal gambling in China (Macau Basic Law, 1998). The Gaming Inspection and Coordination Bureau of Macau (DICJ) governs all aspects of the gaming industry in Macau, from the licensing of casinos to the rehabilitation of problem gamblers. The DICJ is similar to both the CRA and NCPG in Singapore, as it combats criminal activity such as money laundering and provides an exclusion programme for addiction-prone

individuals. As in Singapore, exclusion can be applied for by individuals themselves and by their family members. The DCIJ also provides optional counselling to problem gamblers.

Singapore was inspired by the successes of the casinos of Las Vegas and Macau and sought to build its own casinos. The inclusion of these casinos in larger integrated resorts has allowed Marina Bay Sands and Resorts World Sentosa to differentiate themselves from their competitors. Thus, the gaming industry in Singapore differs greatly from those in the USA and in Macau. The casinos in Singapore are considered merely a part of the sum of recreational activities available, while casinos are the main draw to both Las Vegas and Macau.

The regulatory framework in Macau is similar to that in Singapore as it provides social support for problem gamblers. This is unlike in Las Vegas, where social-problem gambling is addressed only by a non-profit organisation, without any regulatory teeth.

Conclusion

It is clear that the reputation of the IRs have been carefully preserved as destinations for business, leisure and conventions than on solely gaming – something which the Singapore government had sought to achieve right from the start.

The IRs have also rejuvenated Singapore's tourism industry, as it recovered from its earlier slump by welcoming 13.2 million visitor arrivals and garnering over S$22.3 billion in tourism receipts in 2011. They have also generated a massive amount of employment for the industry and the other related sectors, employing about 22,000 employees and supporting another 40,000 jobs throughout the economy (MTI). Thus, great economic benefit has been reaped from the operation of the IRs,

whilst any negative social ripples have been mitigated to a large extent. Therefore, while it may seem slightly premature to draw any conclusions about the IRs, as they have only been in operation for five years, it appears that they, as well as the casinos that they house, are a boon to both Singapore's tourism without compromising on its social well-being.

The Spirit of Enterprise and Indie Businesses

Benjamin Gabriel Sew Jia Jun

There is a stirring in the hearts of Singaporeans. Increasingly, we are getting comfortable with the idea that there are viable career options other than becoming a salaried employee; more and more of us are delving into the business of running businesses. What is interesting is that the impetus in recent times is manifestly rather different from that of the older generations.

In the past, most people were concerned with mere survival and making ends meet. The current zeitgeist is rooted in a movement towards self-actualisation: the pursuing of one's passion in life, not merely turning up for work to put food on the table or to buy a nice car. The question that we then face is: how viable is this, really? Can Singapore sustain such a movement?

Indubitably, a large portion of today's youth aspires to one day own and run a business. Even amongst my own class-mates, few do not profess to hoping that one day they start their own firm, café, bar, or clothing store. Perhaps more importantly, this mentality that spurs the spirit of entrepreneurship also, on some level, compels people to support the small, struggling local cafés or bookshops tucked away in the unlikeliest of corners in Singapore.

The charm and allure of small businesses lies in the personal touch offered, and the knowledge that the money you spent on whatever product you just purchased is not sucked into and lost in a corporate abyss, but goes directly into helping build something special. Your dollar is not just another chink in the cash register, but a vote that says you believe in direction the business is headed, and want to see it survive. This is a sentiment I can relate to personally.

The idea of DIY, small, home-grown businesses as a driver for niche interests is far from new. It took root in American counterculture through the punk movement of the 1960s

and 1970s, and was rehashed in the indie revolution of the 1980s. The underlying motivation was to provide for an eco-system that formed around certain niches, be it music, books, coffee, or even beer. This model is really starting to take off in Singapore.

Good Beer, Good Company

Perhaps one of the greatest success stories that I can person-ally relate is that of The Good Beer Company and its founder-owner, Daniel Goh. Goh was retrenched from his previous job, and decided that that was when he was going to start a business. Goh was passionate about beer but found that Singapore sorely lacked a place with a decent selection of beers at affordable prices. This led to his founding of The Good Beer Company, which is tucked away in a corner of Chinatown Complex.

I got to know of The Good Beer Company through the open-ing of his retail shop, 99 Bottles. These were still the nascent years for craft beer in Singapore, so when I caught wind of a bottle store opening, I had to go. It was there that I was acquainted with Goh and much of the community. I made off with two bags full of beer and the address of The Good Beer Company. That was how The Good Beer Company became my go-to place for a beer fix, and eventually, for a while, my workplace.

On the one hand, it was quaint that we were all taking on these schizophrenic roles within the community – I was both buyer and employee. We were all at some point, to some extent, snobs, but concurrently also had to dial down our selection and recommendations to cater to neophytes who were not used to having beers that ran into 60 IBUs, or beers

that had chilli in them. It was an awkward period, almost like the industry was going through its pubescent phase.

I remember it was also a time when we would sometimes see worryingly quiet nights, and when people did come, it's mostly the same, familiar few faces. Goh has come a long way from that and now even has a tap stall a few doors down from where The Good Beer Company stands (the tap stall was recently picked as one of the top 30 bars in the world. And they don't even have a bar!).

What really interested me was how the people in these niche industries tended to take an interest in, and support each other. It was actually through beer escapades that I got to know the people involved with Dutch Colony Coffee as well.

Going Dutch

Dutch Colony started off as an initiative by a couple of friends who loved coffee. They had sourced for their own beans and won some competitions, so when Pasar Bella opened, they were there.

I suppose it is apposite to go into some detail as to what Pasar Bella is, as it has some bearing on our narrative. Pasar Bella was an initiative to emulate farmers' market found overseas, by bringing in suppliers and distributors into one rustic location – although it is debatable how successful this model is a year into operations.

In any case, I had the fortune of dropping by Dutch Colony while they were setting up and had some of their coffees, laughing and bonding over the love for tasty beverage. Passion is infectious, and the intermingling of beer and coffee talk was intoxicating in and of itself. It did not help that The Drinking Partners had a stall a short walk from Dutch Colony.

Dutch Colony has since continued to grow from strength to strength.

The common thread, at least in my humble opinion, is that these two initiatives succeeded in catering to a local crowd and building an ecosystem and community around the business. This seems to be what kept them afloat for long enough to flourish.

Getting Booked

I remember I once had the pleasure of chancing upon a pop-up bookstore, Booktique, run by freelance writer Anthony Koh Waugh. I walked past his temporary storefront located at The Cathay at that time, and the quirky, DIY look caught my attention: books were shelved in repurposed cardboard boxes, held together by bull clips, and tinny classical music rang from Koh Waugh's iPhone. Books were propped up by the flaps of the boxes they were housed in, and geeky, literary paraphernalia and thin cushions adorned the otherwise spartan-setup.

As I entered, Koh Waugh excitedly greeted me. Being curious, I enquired as to the philosophy behind his store. He enthusiastically related how, as a writer, there was a dearth of bookstores catering to his needs, but instead of brushing it off as would most of us, he decided to do something about it. He proceeded to start this pop-up bookstore carrying a carefully curated selection; the selection catered to writers and true bookworms and included self-published titles and other rarities. He related one of his grievances during the course of our conversation – high overheads in Singapore. This was, in part, what prevented him from settling into a permanent location, and is a common struggle every business owner faces in Singapore.

Indeed, starting and maintaining a business is tough work. It is not a bed of roses, and small business owners have to do everything, from inventory-keeping, accounts, delivery, marketing, just to name a few.

The Demise of a Lion

A personal heartache of mine is Jungle Beer, or Barefoot Brewing Co. It was one of the few truly local microbreweries, and the only one, to date, that was not a brewpub. They made a selection of regular styles like stout, porter, English ale, and also delved into very interesting stuff that Adi, the head brewer and founder, thought might work. They tried to incorporate local flavours and ingredients into established styles, and ended up with things like durian beer, mango and orange wheat beer, chilli beer, and the list goes on. Some were hits, some were misses, all of them were interesting, and, most importantly, local. The brewery gathered a small following, and their *kiasu* stout was the beer that all of us were proud to recommend to the uninitiated.

Sometime in 2014, they had to shut down operations due to various circumstances, but a large part of the problem was that the final retail price of the products was ending up much higher than anyone liked. I remember Adi lamenting that in Singapore, quality for quality, it is cheaper to import craft beer than to make it. There was also a prevailing opinion at the time, that in straddling the craft and mass market, Jungle fell between the cracks and captured neither.

A Hostile Environment?

This brings to the fore the perennial problem that plagues Singapore start-ups, insanely high overheads expenses. This forces a lot of these businesses to abandon their original ideology and chase revenue for the sake of revenue, leaving us with disgruntled, disillusioned entrepreneurs, as well as rather disenfranchised customers.

There is some hope that, perhaps, the market is changing. Singaporeans are now far more inclined to support small-business endeavours. Also, with increased connectedness, a start-up, if done right, really does have the world as its oyster. In this, it might be more plausible that small start-ups do find a customer base of a sufficient size to sustain operations without discounting its original intentions.

With this, much like how the indie revolution took off in 1980s America and gave rise to a whole new understanding of what music, graphic novels and literature could mean to the average person, this growing trend in Singapore could open up new horizons to us. Maybe one day, a Singaporean coffee, or a Singaporean beer, would make it on the world's stage and put us on the map.

Whilst that might be a possibility, it is, sadly, highly improbable; as much as a modernising, changing world augments career paths available to the average person, there are daunting limitations. In a country like Singapore, with its big state and multinational sector, high cost of rent and other utilities, coupled with a small domestic market, there are major debilitating factors militating against SMEs. For every one success story that we witness, there is a graveyard of failed ventures with unmarked headstones. Furthermore, staying small is often not an option either. Even if one manages to establish a relatively sustainable small business, in all likelihood, given

the way that landlords work in Singapore, the rent will increase upon expiration of the lease, pushing costs up again.

I am not suggesting these problems do not exist outside Singapore; in fact, I am positive they do. What I think is worth drawing attention to is the fact that certain conditions present in Singapore exacerbate the risks one has to undertake when starting a business here. The high cost of living, intensive capital requirement, and infinitesimal domestic market make starting up and maintaining a small business much harder and more painful for an aspiring entrepreneur. In fact, I made final edits to this essay a mere few days after Daniel announced the official closure of 99 Bottles.

As such, it is with a heavy heart that I have to conclude by saying that, at least for now, I seriously doubt the long-term viability of such small enterprises, not to mention their ability to reshape the country. Perhaps indie businesses do not have a place in the future of enterprise in Singapore.

Singaporean Job-hoppers and Japanese Salarymen

Timothy Ang Wei Kiat

Mikihiko Tachi

Introduction

S peak of the high propensity of Singaporeans to job hop and one will elicit sheepish smiles. International recruiting firms label Singaporeans as "the world's most chronic job-hoppers." Studies show that 71% of Singaporean workers are either actively or passively searching for a new employer.

One might dismiss "job promiscuity" as just a favourite Singaporean pastime. However, there are serious repercussions. Excessive job hopping may be one of the reasons labour productivity is stagnant in recent years, despite government grants aimed at increasing productivity. The seriousness of the situation is exacerbated by the fact that human capital is Singapore's *only* natural resource. Foreign firms are concerned that excessive job hopping, coupled with the recent labour market-tightening measures, may hinder the operation of businesses.

The image of Japanese salarymen as contemporary corporate samurai loyal to companies contrasts with that of job-hopping Singaporeans. The concept of kinship within a company is baffling to Singaporeans.

This essay begins by analysing the reasons for Singaporeans' chronic job hopping and posits that money and the capitalisation of one's youth are primary motivators. It then analyses Japan's corporate culture of loyalty as a possible model to emulate. The essay suggests that while the *practices* of seniority-based salaries and master-servant relationships are unsuitable for wholesale adoption, the Japanese mindset of kinship within companies is something which Singapore can learn from.

In addition to statistics, this essay includes anecdotes from the authors and their friends, so as to portray the different perceptions of Singaporeans and Japanese with regard to job hopping.

Restless Feet: Higher Salaries and Expiration Dates

Getting a higher salary is one reason for job hopping. A recent Randstand Workmonitor survey reveals that 70 percent of Singaporeans will change their job just to obtain a higher salary. Singaporeans seek other potential employers to gauge if they are being paid competitive wages. Statistics show that workers who stay with their company receive salary hikes of 3-6 percent, whereas successful job-hoppers can enjoy increases of 15–20 percent.

Another main motivator is the perception held by younger Singaporeans that workers are past their expiration dates when they hit their late 40s. Such a perception is not unfounded. Granted, Singapore's unemployment rate remains at a low 2 percent and older employees can find jobs, though not always up to their expectations. The issue is underemployment. Middle-aged degree holders often face difficulties getting re-employed and end up settling for jobs that do not make good use of their qualifications or experience. Young Singaporeans, fearing the same fate, aim to earn as much as possible while they can.

By focusing primarily on pecuniary benefits, Singaporeans adopt a *short-term* and *narrow* perspective in deciding to switch jobs. This behavioural pattern discourages companies from investing time and money to train workers beyond the bare minimum, as they are afraid that the employee would not stay long enough for them to recoup their training investment.

It is unclear which is the cause or effect: whether Singaporeans' propensity to job hop is caused by the reluctance of companies to train and retain middle-aged workers or vice versa. This phenomenon has turned into a self-reinforcing vicious cycle. Reluctance to invest in developing human capital results in the lack of incentive to retain middle-aged

employees. This, in turn, propagates the perception that middle-aged workers will get retrenched, which fuels the desire of younger employees to capitalise on their youth and work for the highest bidder. The result is lower productivity – companies under-invest in training and younger employees job hop.

Japan as a Possible Model

Japan, on the other hand, with some of the longest average job tenures in the world, is the polar end from Singapore's job promiscuity. There are lessons to be learnt from the Japanese employment model.

Kinship in the Company

The Japanese place a strong emphasis on human relationships (*ningen kankei* – 人間関係), and perceive the company as a family. Freshly hired graduates often begin their career with camps called *kensyu* (研修), where they learn to interact with others in the company. Academics have termed such relationships as "pseudo kinship ties … a family-based mode of organisation." Unlike Singaporeans who perceive work in purely monetary terms and are thus more inclined to leave for better salaries, the Japanese form ties which bind them to their companies. As a result, Japanese corporations are more willing to make a *long-term* investments in human capital. This approach raises two questions: first, how do Japanese corporations create this sense of kinship; and second, can and should these methods be transplanted into Singapore?

Practices Creating Kinship

One practice that discourages job hopping amongst Japanese salarymen is seniority-based pay (*nenko joretsu* – 年功序列). Salary increments hinges substantially on the length of one's tenure (perceived as loyalty) at a company. While competence and skills are considered, long tenures result in employees being paid more than their worth. Companies transfer below-average employees to subsidiaries rather than fire them.

Apart from the atypical instances of being headhunted, job hopping is perceived negatively as it means starting at lower-level positions and having to build new relationships in the new company.

Another notable Japanese characteristic is the formation of a master-servant relationship (*shuzyu kankei* – 主従関係) between the company and the salaryman. The sense of kinship arises largely from the corporations' willingness to continuously develop human capital. With internships rare in Japan, Japanese corporations practice the "*shinsotsu-ikkatsu-saiyō*" system, where fourth-year undergraduates are hired *en masse*. Unlike Singaporean companies, Japanese companies rarely inquire about grades. Instead, they focus on the student's co-curricular activities and passion for the company to assess his or her soft skills. An executive at the leading trading firm mentioned to one of the authors that his company *only* looks at the candidate's potential in dealing with the stress of the workplace, and soft skills like the ability to work well with others. Additionally, 67 percent of Japanese graduates are "*bunkei*", that is, students who major in the arts and social sciences. Their knowledge may not be directly transferable to the workplace. This, however, is inconsequential as corporations are prepared to train the inexperienced graduates from scratch. The system of "*shinsotsu-ikkatsu-saiyō*" allows

graduates of Japanese literature or history with average academic scores to be hired by investment banks.

The practice of offering new graduates without any work experience a chance to receive don-the-job training is widely recognised as an effective way to attract talent. This willingness to invest in human capital extends to foreign applicants. A final-year sociology student at Nanyang Technological University recently attended a job interview with Toshiba. What struck him as being radically different from Singaporean companies was that the interview *did not* focus on what additional value he could bring to the company. Rather, it centred on his willingness to commit to Toshiba in exchange for the detailed training programme that he would receive in Japan.

The development of human capital continues way past entry-level employees. A casual survey of a number of Japanese firms' websites indicated that development opportunities exists at *every stage* of a workers' career: *from entry to retirement*. The training programmes range from workshops and language classes for entry-level employees to sponsored overseas MBA graduate programmes for senior employees. The willingness to *continually* invest in employees creates a sense of pride, gratitude and attachment to the company.

Applicability of Japanese Practices

We conclude that seniority-based pay is unlikely to take root in Singapore. It is incompatible with Singapore's emphasis on meritocracy. The wholesale adoption of the master-servant relationship in Japanese companies is also unlikely to find favour among companies and workers in Singapore.

We, however, believe that the *mindset* of Japanese corporations on the importance of continuous development of human

capital and the *mindset* of Japanese employees on loyalty are worth a close look. A *tailored* approach modelled after the Japanese corporate culture of continuous development of human capital would break the vicious cycle of high job turnover and low lifetime training investments. By emulating Japanese corporations in designing *detailed and continuous* training programmes for employees, employees will factor in these improved development opportunities as additional criteria in their decision to switch jobs. Companies will also be more inclined to retain productive middle-aged workers as they have previously invested heavily in developing them.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the authors hope Singapore companies will consider an employment model with three features: continuous human capital investment, a mindset of long-term employment to retain productive middle-aged employees and pay based solely on performance. Such a model will reduce chronic job hopping by encouraging employees to take a longer-term perspective and greater loyalty to their company. The authors recognise that the success of the proposed model hinges on both companies and employees changing their mindsets.

Singapore: Best Destination for Young Japanese?

Mikihiko Tachi

J apan was Asia's first major economic power and it went on to be the first industrialised country in Asia after recovering from the catastrophic defeat of World War II. Lee Kuan Yew, the first Prime Minister of Singapore, has said: "the Japanese, now they have spirit. They are strong, they work hard, they sacrifice, and they are No. 1 in the world. Their cars, their machines, their technology, are all No. 1. Such undisguised respect for the Japanese is an indication of the Singaporean obsession with success, with being No. 1" (Buruma, 1988).

Japan's economic prowess, however, has become a thing of the past due to stagnation since the early 1990s. In contrast, Singapore's economy has made significant improvements since the 1990s and its per capita income now exceeds that of Japan. Lee Kuan Yew is known to have said: "life, to be sure, will remain comfortable enough for middle-class Japanese for many years to come. Unlike the developed countries of the West, Japan has not accumulated enormous foreign debts. The country is also technologically advanced and the people are well educated but eventually Japan's problems will catch up with it. If I am a Japanese youth and I am able to speak English, I would probably choose to emigrate." (AFP, 2013)

Japan now has several internal problems which include an aging population, economic stagnation, the uncertain future of nuclear power and unresolved tensions with South Korea and China. The Japanese government, under Prime Minister Mr Shinzo Abe, has been grasping at drastic solutions with an economic reform package dubbed "Abenomics" and the diffusion of Japanese "cool" culture towards Asian countries. The ability of Japan to adapt to globalisation remains one of the largest concerns of the Japanese government. An example that exemplifies their concern would be the policy put in

place by MEXT (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology). The policy aims to increase global exposure for Japanese students by offering promising Japanese students scholarships to go on international exchange programmes. The objective is to allow them to have a different view and perception of the world. Coincidentally, one such scholar is here at Singapore Management University (SMU) as an exchange student.

However, a former Japanese politician, Kotara Tamura, recently shared that it may be too late for Japanese students to head abroad to gain experiences and learn more about the world. He was the former senator and parliamentary secretary of cabinet office in charge of economic and fiscal policy in Japan. He has since moved on to assume the position of an adjunct professor at the Lee Kuan Yew (LKY) School of Public Policy of the National University of Singapore (NUS). He was the first, and remains the only, politician accomplished and prominent enough to be documented and studied in a Harvard case study, *A Politician in a Leather Suit and the Paradox of Japanese Capitalism*. He would receive the most mentions should you ask anyone for the names of any prominent Japanese they are aware of who moved to Singapore. Tamura's belief that the Japanese need to keep an eye on, and pay more attention to, Asian countries, especially Singapore, is worth our attention. Why does he think that Japan needs to focus on this intelligent and small country?

He recently published a book in Japanese entitled *Encouraging a Shift to Asia*. The book is not targeted at only an academic audience but the Japanese reader. The book attracted my attention due to his impressive background, which con-tributed to making the material more interesting. The content of his books suggests that the solution to Japan regaining,

or, at least, maintaining, its national power in the face of internal problems lies in the Asian region.

An important reason that prompted his move to Singapore was his daughter's education. He believes that in order to remain competitive and relevant in this highly globalised world, it is necessary for young Japanese to be exposed to diversity from a young age since Japan no longer holds economic and political supremacy. Therefore, he made the decision to move to Singapore to allow his daughter to receive global exposure and be educated in the world-class education system present in Singapore.

There are reasons to wonder why Singapore would be a better option as compared to the USA or Europe; he explains the reasons in his book as follows. Besides the fact that there are still many Japanese watchdogs who continues to keep an eye on those regions, the first reason would be that the Asian region including Singapore, is much closer to Japan in comparison to the USA. It requires more than ten hours for a trip to the USA while most of Asia is only about five to six hours by air from Tokyo. More importantly, the USA has been steadily attracting talent from all over the world and it is saturated with talents. Japanese heading over to the US would then have to compete with the large talent pool present in the USA for job opportunities.

Japan shares greater cultural similarities with most Asian countries for instance rice is a staple in Japan as in most Asian countries. The language barrier is also not as significant a problem as compared to English-speaking countries like the USA or the United Kingdom. Singaporeans, especially the young, speak English. on a daily basis and it is also the official and primary language of the country. Their unique accent gives us the assurance that accents would not pose a huge

problem when it comes to using English as the tool of communication for business purposes. The most believable point Tamura mentioned is that most Singaporeans have a positive perception of Japan. It is true that the Japanese wreaked great damage in Asian countries during the Second World War. However, it is equally true that many victims of Japan's aggression also show appreciation for what Japan did after World War II ended. Singapore's political party's ability to keep the unpleasant history it shared with Japan separate from the business it has with Japan, remains a crucial factor in making Singapore a good business partner of Japan. This has not gone unappreciated by the Japanese.

I personally feel that young Singaporeans are positively inclined towards Japan. Tamura is right to identify that the rising economic powers will come from Asia but my view is that he may be mistaken about how the older generation feels about Japan. China and India will account for half the world's GDP before the end of this century and will become the most important markets for Japanese goods.

It is a known fact that Japanese leading companies are facing struggles with the management of their local staff. This struggle is also relevant in Singapore. Japanese managers are surprised to find that many Singaporeans are not accepting of their Japanese management style. It is natural for younger workers to leave a company if they are able to find a more suitable or higher-paying one, while Japanese people tend to stick to one company throughout their lives. Goods made in Japan may be highly regarded for their quality but more Japanese goods are now being made outside Japan. Japanese managers have to learn how to manage cultural differences as they should not expect the Japanese lifetime employment

system to be applicable to all Asian countries, since different countries have different cultures.

Emigrating to Singapore is not an opportunity that every Japanese can get. Having experienced studying abroad for a year, I would suggest that young Japanese should take a closer look at the world and be more aware of what is happening around the globe. I believe that a sense of danger plays an important role in this globalised world.

I have an ethnic Chinese Singaporean friend from Singapore Management University. He is currently pursuing a degree at the Lee Kong Chian School of Business. One day, he asked me why I think Singaporean students study that hard while we talked about the difference of our respective education system. I told him that Singaporeans simply believe wealth equates happiness, that the greater their wealth the greater their happiness. He replied that:

> you might have seen some of us eating lunch and dinner on one's own at the library as we study. Some of them are not even engaging in any co-curricular activities. They do not really like making friends because they are afraid that their GPA would suffer as a result. They are afraid that they might not be able to get a good job and cannot afford to buy a home in this small country, unlike in Japan.

I do realise that Singaporeans have no choice but to place their career above their own enjoyment. This fear of failure motivates Singaporeans to focus on economic success. In my opinion, their spirit suffers from a lack of stimulation and enrichment. Japanese students, at least those who are around me, are not too worried about Japan's future. Many of us are complacent and lack a sense of urgency, believing that we will solve those problems as our seniors have done before us. The best lesson that the Japanese can learn from Singapore may be to develop this sense of urgency.

Owning a Home – Aspirations and Realities

Austin Vincent Mudd

Noelle Tan Rui Jia

A Step into The Past

O wning a home in Singapore is a priority in the lives of most Singaporeans. However, despite certain redistributive measures, it is fast becoming a dream that only the rich can fulfil. There are many differences in the ability to purchase a home but the gap was not always so pronounced.

In 1964, the Singapore government wanted to give citizens a stake in the country. It introduced the Home Ownership Scheme to provide low-cost public housing for the population. Its tremendous success in meeting this basic need has changed Singapore's built environment and contributed to Singapore's economic and social progress. Singapore's success in achieving its housing goals has not gone unnoticed. It made an impression on President George W. Bush who said: "we want more people owning their own home … and so have a vital stake in the future of our country".

Many older Americans pegged their personal worth to the size of their homes, yearning for a bigger house than their neighbours. In contrast, the younger generation prefers urban living. In Singapore, the opposite is observed. Amenities are away from the city centre – housing estates are self-contained towns with schools, supermarkets, food joints and recreational facilities – leaving the inner urban core for mostly businesses and retail trade.

The American Reality

Home ownership, once taken as a given in America, is too fast becoming a dream. Student loans in the US exceeded US$1.1 trillion in 2014, a figure which has more than

quadrupled since 2003. A high proportion of people aged 20-39 have student debt. The average student loan has also risen. After the 2008-9 global financial crisis, lenders have become more sensitive to the debt-to-income ratios of prospective borrowers. Millennials are finding it harder to qualify for housing loans.

Another factor influencing home ownership rates is delayed marriages. Millennials are marrying later than their counterparts in previous generations. In 1950, men and women married at an average age of 22.8 and 20.3 respectively. Those averages are now 29.0 and 26.6. In 2013, less than one-third of 20-34 year olds were married, as compared to 77 percent 50 years ago. As family formation is being postponed, renting a house, rather than owning one, becomes a more viable option.

Many households still see home ownership as a plausible option. Current occupants of rented units are confident about owning the roof over their heads. The most appealing housing type seems to be single-family homes, which typically have a land area roughly the same as that occupied by a bungalow in Singapore.

John Lennon is believed to have said: "a dream you dream alone is only a dream. A dream you dream together is reality." Many Americans would not agree. They can continue to aspire for a house with a big green lawn, but that dream is receding. Less than half of them have the financial means to meet stringent criteria for mortgage loans.

The Singapore Reality

In contrast to the US, the Singapore government heavily subsidises tertiary education in state-supported universities. It also provides grants to help for young Singaporean families

to buy their first publicly-built apartment. The goal, not achieved so far, is that young families would be encouraged to have more children and so raise the fertility rate which has been declining for decades.

Home ownership remains a key social pillar. It spurs Singaporeans to work harder and give them a stake in the country. But as in the US, fulfilling their dream of owning a subsidised apartment is becoming harder due to rapidly rising property prices in recent years.

An over-protective government, a nanny state as it is some-times called, tries its best to make housing more affordable, with grants tailored to suit the needs of applicants. Projects such as the Design Build and Sell Scheme (DBSS) and Executive Condominiums (ECs) were also launched to satisfy aspirations for upgraded housing options. Many buyers upgraded in the hope of realising capital gains at a later date. Others aspire to live near the central business district or in choice districts close to their workplace or elite schools. It is not wrong to dream big but such expectations raise questions. A standard flat is no longer good enough. They want and think they deserve better.

Money, Money, Money, Not So Funny

When potential buyers make a decision that would shape their lives in the future, the first things that come to mind include the decor, location, and social status associated with the property. The common thread running all these items is money. The conventional mortgage for borrowers in the US requires a 20 percent down payment. Whilst previously attain-able, stagnant wages, student debt repayment and rising home and rental prices mean that a typical millennial would

need 12.5 years to save up that first 20 percent. To mitigate this, legislation has been passed to make home ownership more attainable via a programme which allows first-time buyers to have access to 3 percent down payment loans. Loan applicants must still meet eligibility requirements to ensure the crisis of 2008 does not repeat itself.

In Singapore, a typical 4-room flat priced at S$300,000 would come with a 10 percent down payment and a 20-25-year-loan. A two-income millennial family would have to save for at least five years to make the down payment. It would seem that millennials in both countries face similar obstacles to living in their own home.

What's Next?

Following behind Lithuania and Romania, Singapore ranks third in home ownership rate in the world; nearly 9 out of 10 Singaporeans live in a home they own. This is an achievement that calls for celebration as it was attained in less than half a century of rapid economic growth. The USA places 34th with less than two-thirds of Americans owning their own homes. This comparison puts Singapore in a positive light. The benefits of rental housing in the American context, however, should not be discounted. The USA is a big country and career changes mean that many families will uproot themselves and have less incentive to buy a permanent home.

The idea of home ownership is changing. The younger generation in the US attaches less importance to home ownership. Young people prefer to live in small rental apartments and hold 'cool' jobs in big cities like New York and San Francisco. A city-state like Singapore cannot be compared with a big country like the US. Singaporeans cannot expect to have the

same range of housing choices and places to live as most Americans do. Most young Singaporeans must accept the fact of land scarcity in Singapore or emigrate if their overriding ambition in life is to own a landed property with a big garden.

Greening a Cityscape

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The Road Less Travelled

Any mention of sunny little Singapore often conjures up these images – a humble fishing village; a prized discovery by Sir Stamford Raffles; a bustling trading port. Fast-forward to today, Singapore is known to the world as a Garden City, an idiosyncratic harmonisation of metropolis and greenery. Singapore's "clean, green, and mean" reputation remains prominent on the global city stage. Space constraints have compelled the island-state to develop innovative land-scaping and land-saving solutions, which also advance its economic and social aims. A pioneer in urban landscaping with decades of experience, Singapore has recently under-taken advisory roles in the planning of numerous cities. In a global setting, these roles have reinforced Singapore's posi-tion as an expert in urban planning and enhanced its diplomatic ties with large and small countries.

Efforts at maintaining a green city began long before Singapore's independence. The British administration in colonial Singapore was concerned with the alarming rates of deforestation,[1] focusing its attention on conserving Singapore's natural foliage. Post-independence, the focus has been on creating organised greenery compatible with urban living.

Unlike its neighbouring countries, Singapore took the road less travelled with respect to urban planning and greening the island-state, an approach that has made all the difference. Besides giving priority to development challenges in the 1960s, then Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew also had the vision of making Singapore a Garden City. In his memoirs, he articu-lated the view that "clean and green" projects should be aligned with developmental incentives. These cost-effective projects would differentiate Singapore from countries in the region. At the outset, Mr Lee perceived greening as an integral

part of a developmental strategy. The vibrant hues of bougainvillea shrubs lining the roads along Changi Airport were an early conception; Mr Lee wanted foreign investors and leaders who visited Singapore to be impressed in this respect. Likewise, Mr Lee held a novel but firm conviction that possessing first-world standards of organised, well-maintained greenery created a visual testimony reflecting the government's competency and commitment to building up the country. In the words of National Development Minister Khaw Boon Wan, Mr Lee was often referred to as "the Chief Gardener". Mr Lee's dedication was the driving force behind Singapore's transformation into a green city.

A Greening Evolution

Singapore's greening efforts have evolved in the past five decades. What began as a pillar of national economic strategy has morphed to encompass social and environmental conservation goals. From 1959-70, pressing social and economic challenges, including housing and unemployment were foremost in the minds of the political leadership, but attention was given also to roadside greenery, in large part to impress important visitors and attract foreign investments.

As rapid economic growth in the 1970s alleviated the shortfall in housing and job creation, the government turned its attention to sprucing up living spaces and improving the quality of life for ordinary people. Mr Lee had observed that greenery was more prevalent in areas where rich people stayed. He felt that "this cannot be the case for his Singapore. In his Singapore, if greenery was to only be found in places where the rich stayed," there would be immense dissatisfaction (Ghani, 2011).

Mr Lee's vision of Singapore as a Garden City manifested itself in the planting of trees along roads and of climbers on flyovers and overhead bridges. Cleaning operations of rivers and streets commenced in the mid-1970s. In 1975, the Parks and Trees Act was enacted to give the Parks and Recreation Department the discretion to plan ahead for the development of parks and other recreational facilities. For the first time, government authorities could conceptualise a long-term development plan instead of reacting to issues in an ad hoc manner. This allowed them to bring greenery to the heartland, enriching the lives of ordinary citizens.

Recent Efforts

Despite having transformed into a Garden City, Singapore stays committed to developing further the island's greenery further with three broad objectives in mind – economic, social and space optimisation.

The 1991 Concept Plan laid the foundation for many important initiatives that have shaped the landscape of Singapore. For example, the Plan set aside Jurong Island for oil refineries and chemical plants, thus freeing up land on the mainland for other uses. The creation of regional commercial centres eased traffic in the central business district (CBD) and brought jobs closer to homes.[2] In the case of Marina Bay, planning began even earlier in the 1970s with land reclamation. Today, Marina Bay, with the establishment of the Marina Bay Financial Centre, is a seamless extension of the central business district.

On the same reclaimed land, Singapore has built Gardens by the Bay, an immensely popular tourist attraction but also one that appears "artificial" to some visitors.[3] What is less

known to visitors is that urban Singapore has a rich biologically diverse environment and with 9 percent of the country's land set aside for nature reserves.[4]

Besides nature reserves, a network of park connectors and other recreational facilities built close to residential areas have improved the quality of life of Singaporeans. Promenades, boardwalks and bridges have made it easier for the public to enjoy waterfronts and coastlines. For instance, the Punggol Eco-Town, Singapore's first waterfront eco-town, provides smaller estates better access to green spaces that encourage walking and cycling. The eco-town has also designed transit and car sharing systems to reduce car usage and exhaust emissions.

A community-in-bloom project encourages miniature gardens in HDB areas. These gardens have helped strengthen community bonds. They double also as outdoor classrooms for children to learn about plants, gardening and nature. Maximising land use is not limited to ground level. Efforts are being made to create a "Vertical Garden City" in the form of rooftop gardens, vertical green walls, and sky terraces.

Sharing Greening Expertise

Singapore's accumulated experience in green urban planning has created new business opportunities for its companies. Companies such as Surbana, JTC Corporation and Ascendas are sharing their greening expertise with developing countries including China and India. Both countries are experiencing rapid urbanisation as well as a deteriorating urban environment.[5] By 2025, China, for example, must cope with an additional 350 million urban dwellers and their needs for housing and a liveable environment.[6] With its tested expertise in urban planning, Singapore is well placed to provide innovative solutions to many developing nations.

The Sino-Singapore Tianjin eco-city project is an example of Singapore's involvement in the urban planning of other cities. A partnership between Singapore and China that began in 2007, the project is modelled after Singapore's concept of a garden city.[7] The plan is to have lush vegetation at the centre of the Eco-City and an average of 12 square metres of verdant space for each citizen, thereby providing an ecological environment to combat the country's pollution woes.

Sceptics however, have voiced doubts over the success of the Tianjin Eco-City as the Eco-City has only attracted 12,000 residents eight years after the partnership has been signed, despite being envisioned to cater to 350,000 residents by the time of its completion in 2020. Fears have risen that Tianjin Eco-City may end up as a ghost city with few occupants, following the footsteps of its predecessors, such as Heibei's Caofeidian – a stalled eco-city project that was once heralded by Hu Jintao to be "as precious as gold".

The slow influx of people into the eco-city has many indigenous causes that are beyond Singapore's influence and/or interference. One is the still strong attachment people have for their home cities.[8] Another is the fact that the eco-city is some 50 km from the main city of Tianjin.

That said, Neville Mars, a Shanghai-based architect authoring a book on China's Eco-Cities, considers the Tianjin Eco-City project a qualified success, especially when compared with other stalled foreign-partnered city projects. This is because, unlike Hebei's Caofeidian, Tianjin Eco-City is still being built and progressing as planned. With 2.6 million people in Tianjin still living in rural areas and rising property prices in other Chinese cities, Tianjin Eco-City's appeal to rural migrants will rise. In fact, a change in attitude may already be happening. A recent BBC TV interview of residents in Tianjin Eco-City suggests that many local businesses in the eco-city are seeing

an increase in the number of their customers. The eco-city has also attracted about S$231.2 million (1.19 billion yuan) worth of investments from Singapore-based companies.[9] With occupancy rates rising, Tianjin Eco-City may well experience a rapid surge in rural-urban migrants.

Concluding Thoughts

Singapore adopted, from independence, an unconventional approach to development and greenery. Over the years, it has accumulated a wealth of knowledge and solutions to urban landscaping and environmental issues. Its experience suggests that rapid development and a sustainable environment are not mutually exclusive goals. More cities are showing interest in its green landscaping experience. Andhra Pradesh in India is seeking Singapore's advice while Singapore is negotiating with Tamil Nadu as part of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's plan of building 100 smart cities. In the future, there will likely be more "little Singapore-like" cities, a development that will enhance Singapore's image abroad.

Notes

1. A survey in 1883 showed that only 7 per cent of Singapore remained forested then.
2. Such as the establishment of fringe centres in areas such as Tampines and Novena.
3. Visitors can find 12 synthetic "supertrees" towering at a magnificent 16-storey height. A similar installation, the flower dome, can be found at a stone's throw away, complemented by changing displays in the Flower Field to reflect different seasons and festivals. Such recent developments have contributed to Singapore's metamorphosis from a "Garden City" to a "City in a Garden". Though magnificent, many have commented that such installations are an artificial form of "greenery".
4. The Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve is one key example. Besides holding the distinction of being an ASEAN Heritage Park, it also has a vital role as a stop-over site for migratory birds from places as far as Siberia.
5. Developing countries currently face massive growth rates in urbanisation, which results in congestion and a dearth of living spaces in the existing cities.
6. The figures are based on 2009 study by the McKinsey Global Institute. India likewise requires a feasible response, since urbanisation is expected to hit 75 percent of its population in the next five years. An alternative – albeit illusory – option involves delaying urbanisation, which entails limiting the rural population's access to better healthcare, education and jobs in cities. After all, the World Bank estimates that 80% of the GDP is created in cities. It is impossible for developing countries to acheive middle-income status if urbanisation is scaled down.
7. Three of its KPIs are dedicated to having verdant space and green buildings that provide a quality standard of living for its prospective residents.
8. Experts have articulated that people remain reluctant to move to the new eco-city due to deeper culture and heritage present in other existing cities.
9. This amounts to some 46% of the eco-city's total commercial investments as of this date.

Unseen but Not Unsung

Shemin Ang Qiao Ni

Jan Paul Uhlig

Nicholas Christopher Martin

NoelleTan Rui Jia

Thng Jing Hui

Gaining from Losses

L ocal comedian Hossan Leong sang at The Arts House about how living in Singapore is "not perfect living, but at least it's interesting." That was in 2006. Nine years later, living in Singapore is still as unique as it could be.

The cosmopolitan metropolis has clinched many top positions, from global indices to airport rankings. However, despite achieving stellar results in so many aspects, we unfortunately live with a perceived lack of national identity. The process of building this identity is no easy task. It will always be a 'work-in-progress'. But late Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew never gave up on us. Neither should we.

Some may compare us to China and conclude that we do not have a history, but we do. This year, we celebrate SG50 because we have 50 years' worth of content to fill the history books. Sometimes we forget to tap our cultural roots. This fact may not be in line with our tourism board's idea of the "Singapore brand". But that is no reason to slight the richness of the heritage we possess.

Not Just One Island

We have all heard of Sentosa, but how many of us actually know that the island resort is just one of eight islets collectively known as Singapore's Southern Islands? The other seven not-so-renowned ones are St. John's Island, Lazarus Island, Pulau Seringat, Pulau Tekukor, Kusu Island and two Sisters' Islands.

As much as Singaporeans love our country, we are always planning our next vacation miles away because we think the captivating little red dot is not enough to satisfy our hunger for experiencing new sights. But the Southern Islands are proof

that there are places which remain unexplored, even by locals. Recently, plans were announced to turn some of the islands into eco-tourism destinations for hobby-related activities like fishing and water sports. Other suggestions included a retirement village. However, as at the time of this essay was written (April 2015), the islets are the same today as they were before, pristine and relatively untouched, except for Sentosa.

A quick boat ride away from Marina South Pier will take you to St. John's Island and back for the relatively low price of S$18 each for adults and S$12 each for children. The island, previously known as Pulau Sakijiang Bendera, has a small population which appears to predate the arrival of Sir Stamford Raffles in Singapore. A few residents remain on the island – the majority of them are Malay Muslims. The island has a large population of stray cats, giving rise to its nickname, "Cat Island". In 2000, a causeway link was built between St. John's Island and Lazarus Island to make both destinations more accessible to visitors.

Lazarus Island is paradise on earth with its pristine white sand forming the coastline along turquoise seawater. Compared to the beach along East Coast Park, the beach on the island pales in size, but its tranquillity makes you forget that you are in Singapore. Even on weekends, the place is so quiet that it feels like you are on your own private beach – perfect for an escapade from the hustle and bustle of the city.

North from Lazarus Island is Seringat Island, another isolated piece of land. Rumour has it that there are plans to turn the place into another integrated resort. We will hear the news soon if the rumours are indeed true.

A five-minute boat ride from St. John's Island is Kusu Island. This island is known more commonly to devotees as Tortoise Island in Mandarin and Pulau Tembakul in Malay. Unlike Lazarus Island or Seringat Island, Kusu has seen more

development which includes a Chinese temple and three Malay shrines. Devotees visit the island during the ninth month of the lunar calendar to pray for prosperity, peace, and good health. If you wish to check out the islands before traveling there yourself, Little Day Out and blogger Darren Ng have beautiful snapshots of the island on their websites.

Perhaps, rather surprisingly, the island is frequented by more foreigners than locals. We would say that these tourists made the right choice to wander the paths less travelled. Arguably Singapore's best kept secret, the Southern Islands are well worth a visit before they are "developed". So plan your next short getaway soon!

Fifty Shades of Brown

Bukit Brown Cemetery, listed on the World Monuments Watch site in 2014, is a habitat where both the living and the dead come together. A green space in the midst of a densely populated environment, the cemetery embodies olden Singapore through the last breaths of the buried. Parts of the forest used to be thick and impenetrable, but the tombstones that remain today are not lost to time; they still stand.

Kopi Sua, or Coffee Hill, as it was known to the local community, was established in the early twentieth century. It was, then, the largest Chinese graveyard outside of mainland China. Hidden behind Lornie Road and Mount Pleasant Road, the place was 'partly abandoned' until recently, when the government announced that more than 3000 graves would have to be exhumed to make way for a new road that would cut through the cemetery.

Before the announcement, most Singaporeans were oblivious to the existence of Bukit Brown. The announcement

sparked a public outcry to conserve the area, but to little effect. The mere fact that Bukit Brown is relatively unknown should not be a critical factor in deciding between conservation and redevelopment. After all, many areas such as Little India, Chinatown, and Kampong Glam have been conserved and redeveloped.

The challenge of preserving our past while planning for the future is paved with many difficult choices. In 2013, Acting Minister Lawrence Wong acknowledged the heritage value of Bukit Brown, which led to various efforts to document and commemorate the memories of Bukit Brown for future generations. This is arguably insufficient. For example, a mining company may promise to reconstruct an artificial environment in place of the natural one damaged during the mining operations. The company also guarantees that no ecosystems will be disrupted, and the reconstructed environment will be indistinguishable and exactly as appealing as the original version. Is something amiss? Or could we possibly accept it? Why manicure a bonsai when a real one grows in our own backyard?

Even if documentation is sufficient to preserve heritage, we should still be in a dilemma – whether to derail the housing plans for the nation, or to send the signal that heritage and national identity are worth sacrificing for. It is true that we have the ArtScience Museum, the Singapore Art Museum, and the renowned Asian Civilisations Museum to commemorate our heritage. But these 'dead' artefacts are not more alive than the living museum of dead people.

Bukit Brown is where national souls reside. The Singapore story is built on the backs of immigrants, and the Singapore brand should be built on this story. Our forefathers crossed the seas to catch a glimpse of what was then only a thriving

fishing village, but they chose to stay. They chose to come, to live, and to die and be buried here, and their legacy should remain for future generations to appreciate.

Not another Cemetery

Keramat Bukit Kasita is located at Bukit Purmei, but it is well hidden from view with all the high-rise HDB flats surrounding it. The structure takes one back to the sixteenth century, with its grey concrete walls and blue canvas hanging as shelter from the rain and sun. However, unknown to the majority of Singaporeans, this is a burial ground for many of the Johor royalty as well as some descendants of Sang Nila Utama, who legendarily founded the Kingdom of Singapura in 1299.

This place is currently being taken care by Umi and her husband. Umi is a very friendly Malay lady who can chat with anyone for hours. The couple's living area may look rundown on the outside, built with wooden planks as if a make-shift quarter, but the actual burial site is relatively well maintained and clean. Each yellow statue represents a person who is buried there, and you can easily see the higher-ranking royalty by the size of the statute and its position in the shed.

To get to the site, you can take bus 123 or 131 from Tiong Bahru MRT station and alight along Bukit Purmei Road after the roundabout. Do remember to bring along your own incense and jasmine flowers if you want to drop by for a prayer session. Throwing in two packets of *Kopi-o-kosong* for Umi and her husband won't hurt, and it will probably bring them more delight than you know!

Upon arriving at Keramat Bukit Kasita, one would immediately feel transported from the urban Singapore. The look is reminiscent of a kampong, with cats running around the place,

no modern structure to be found, and no technology installed, other than an old bulky television with very fuzzy image. You will need to climb up a slope to reach the actual burial site. Note also that Umi will prohibit people from entering the actual burial grounds unless you have been coming consistently to give your prayers, but you can always take a look just outside the concrete walls.

Other than taking care of the place, Umi plays the role of giving prayers to the buried royalties here. She will start her prayers early in the morning until about lunchtime, when people will come in to give their prayers after lunch till about 4pm. Umi will then resume her prayers once again. After conversing with her, one will realise that this place is sustained mainly by the devotees regularly come for prayers. Some help by renewing with HDB the land permit, while others try to contribute to ad hoc maintenance to the living quarters. Someone is always helping with something – that's the way it is around here. This small community supports itself in a way that is very similar to the kampong spirit of the past, which has now been mostly lost to urban development. Even Umi, who has an HDB flat, prefers to stay at the site because it is easier for her to offer her prayers. She also feels more comfortable staying here since she has been doing so for a long time.

The community consists of people who don't know each other, but the devotion of coming to Keramat Bukit Kasita has brought them together and created a strong, helpful, and cohesive relationship, in an environment still pretty much kept in the pre-twenty-first century state of things. Though none of them are sure how long this place will remain the way it is before the government decides to repossess the land for redevelopment, we can hope together, that this small paradise can be well kept, hidden away from view, and passed on for years to come.

Just Married

Think retro, think Saturday-night fever. John Travolta may not be the first image that pops into your head when you think 'retro Singapore'; vintage kitchens and Hainanese confectioneries probably beat him to it. While Chin Mee Chin's open-faced toasted buns are unparalleled, Kombi Rocks is the proud owner of vintage automobiles. It doesn't matter whether it is the love for good food or the very photo-worthy fleet of Veedubs that brings people together, Singapore isn't just about COEs and skyscrapers.

Kombi Rocks took over an old school *kopitiam*-style restaurant called Koon Kee which was established in 1971. Both a retro diner and a vintage museum, the classic Volkswagens that the place has to offer put the modern product lines to shame. Kombi is also known as 面包车, which means "bread van" in Mandarin. In the Kombi symbolised freedom, hippie counterculture, free-spiritedness, and 1960s non-conformity.

Kombi Rocks is located on Yio Chu Kang Road, a 10-15 minute walk away from Serangoon or Kovan MRT stations. Bus 136 will take you four stops from Kovan station. Crossing the road will then lead you right into retro-ville. You won't lose your way because the vintage vehicles parked outside the shop could catch your eye even if you weren't specifically looking out for them.

Decorations pay tribute to the Beatles and every vehicle parked within the compound. The furniture gives you the perfect throwback to Singapore in the 1970s–80s. Service at Kombi Rocks is simple – place your order and pay at the counter, and the staff will bring your food to the table. Not only does their menu feel unique, it is unique. Take some time to skim through the background to learn how Kombi Rocks came about – it is written at the back of their menu, not something you see in everyday cafes.

Food ranges from a mixture of Thai cuisine, to Chinese, to Singaporean. The fish maw and crabmeat soup is a must try at S$13. What makes Kombi Rocks more than a diner is that their vintage vehicles are available for rental. Usually, people snatch them up as part of their wedding ceremonies or photo shoots, but the vehicles are open to the public for rental in hourly packages. It will cost you approximately S$150 to drive a smokin' Beetle for an hour; add another S$100 and you get the Kombi.

Many cafés are popping up all over the little red dot, but there are not many that choose to go down the retro path. A Chinese proverb aptly sums up the main purpose of Kombi Rocks – "The old ginger is hotter than the young ginger." Advancement and speed are welcomed in Singapore, but if we throw our past for all things new, we may one day forget where success came from. Kombi Rocks may not throw a stronger punchline than Bukit Brown does, but at least it tries to preserve what is left of Singapore's colourful years.

The Last Kampong

Amidst the skyline of the financial district, the glitz, and glamour of Quay's club scene, it is difficult, especially for a newcomer, to imagine the old way of life in Singapore. To the surprise of many, all it takes to get a glimpse into the way things used to be is a one-hour journey from the city centre into Singapore's last remaining *kampong*. Take bus 70 to the stop at Church of Vincent St. Paul, cross the street, follow the dirt road, and soon you will see the handwritten signs directing you to the *kampong* that is hardly visible through the densely forested area.

Walking into Lorong Kampong Buangkok for the first time is a unique and refreshing experience for one who is residing in or travelling through the midst of the hustle and bustle of modern life in Singapore. Time slows down in the village, and the 20 something families who still live there co-exist simply and peacefully, in stark comparison to the rest of the city-state which was just ranked by BBC as the world's most expensive city.

A condominium near downtown Singapore will cost an exchange student up to S$1000/month, while kampong residents pay their landlord a mere S$30. The houses are connected by dirt paths and are made of wood. They were either made by the hands of their residents, or the family members who preceded them. The trust and camaraderie between families in the *kampong* can be felt and seen, with almost all houses being fully accessible, and any gates that do exist being held wide open. A few families raise chickens of their own, taking advantage of the spacious land that exists almost nowhere else in Singapore.

Unfortunately, this land will not likely exist for much longer. The sight of construction growing closer and closer to the *kampong* is uncomfortable, and even with one visit; the unlikely future of the *kampong* becomes very real. It is only a matter of time before the last *kampong existing* in Singapore becomes the last *kampong* that existed in Singapore, and visiting is certainly worth your time. It is odd that the *kampong* is not more known to tourists and locals alike, and Singapore doesn't do anything to promote it as a place worth coming to. Perhaps this is because it is so directly contrasts with the brand Singapore hopes to portray through Formula One races and the Marina Bay Sands, or perhaps it is because it won't be around for much longer. Whatever the reason, the *kampong*

serves as a reminder to the beauty of simplicity and the necessity of taking a step back every now and then, and should be something taken in by everyone who spends any amount of time in Singapore.

It is important to note, however, that while the *kampong* is certainly a historical site, it is not a museum and it is not an attraction; it is truly home to many families. This is part of what makes visiting such a valuable experience, and it also makes giving respect and privacy of utmost importance. With a courteous and polite approach to the *kampong* and its people, we encourage you to take a step into Singapore's past and appreciate not only its history, but also the life lessons it holds.

Hide and Seek

While Singapore continues to be the playground for the super-rich, alongside citizens who complain of their plight, it is paramount to acknowledge that we choose to see ourselves as poor only because we compare what we have – dollar for dollar. But we are not poor. We are rich. We are rich because we have a history; it may not be as thick as the Chinese books, but it is enough. We are rich because we made good from bad. We are rich because we have emotions: we feel strongly for places we did not grow up in, but we feel nonetheless, because we know our ancestors did. So why hide when we can seek?

Men in Black:
Singaporeans at the World Cup

Matthew Chua Zhi En

Singapore has never competed in any of the past 20 editions of the FIFA World Cup. It has not even made it to the final qualifying of the World Cup. What is less well known is that while their national team has not, Singaporeans have, in fact been, in the FIFA World Cup. I am not talking about taking part through the PlayStation game, but in the actual tournaments of 1974 West Germany, 2002 South Korea and Japan, 2006 Germany and 2010 South Africa World Cup editions. This small group of Singaporeans is not known to most Singaporeans but they have won over foreign football observers with their professionalism and dedication to the game. They are none other than the men in black – FIFA football referees who hail from Singapore.

Singapore is a country with a small population. In 50 years of independence, it has not been able to produce even one world-class footballer. Despite this, we have been able to produce a number of world-class referees, something many larger countries have not achieved. Out of the four Singaporeans who have gone on to take on refereeing roles in the FIFA World Cup, one name stands out: Shamsul Maidin. Born and raised in Singapore, some of the highlights in Maidin's career include officiating in the 1996, 2000, and 2004 AFC Asian Cup. However, his claim to fame was officiating in the 2006 FIFA World Cup in Germany, where he was in charge of three group games. In doing so, he became the first referee in the tournament to brandish a red card and also the first Singaporean to referee more than one game at a FIFA World Cup, beating the record previously set by George Suppiah. Furthermore, Maidin was voted best referee in the group stage of the 2006 FIFA World Cup in an ESPN Soccernet vote, which made it a real shame that he was not chosen as a referee for the knockout phase of the 2006 FIFA World Cup. Nevertheless, Maidin proved to the

football world that world-class referees can come from countries that are not footballing powerhouses on the world stage.

In the 1970s, we had Singaporean referee trailblazer and pioneer George Suppiah, who in 1974 became the first Asian referee to officiate a World Cup game in the then West Germany. It would take another 32 years before Maidin would match and eclipse his record at the FIFA World Cup. In recent years, we have had K. Viswanathan and Jeffrey Goh officiating as assistant referees in the 2002 FIFA World Cup and 2010 FIFA World Cup respectively. With four notable individuals having already represented Singapore, it is foreseeable that others will follow suit in future editions of the FIFA World Cup and join this exclusive group of Singaporeans who have made their mark on the beautiful game's biggest tournament.

So, how does one start on the long journey from the shores of Singapore to referee at the FIFA World Cup? The answer begins in the office of the referee's department at the Football Association of Singapore. It all starts with referee-hopefuls signing up for the Referees Basic Course, which is open to all members of the public, both male and female, from the ages of 16-36. This is a four-day course which teaches the basic laws and rules of the game of football, an essential aspect of being a football referee. Upon completion of the course, participants proceed on to a series of written, practical and fitness tests before they graduate as Class 3 referees. From then on, the journey is still long as new referees have to start out as assistant referees before being promoted to referees or given bigger games to officiate. Progress depends on a number of factors, such as commitment, knowledge, fitness, showmanship, and the ability to make reasoned decisions in highly contentious situations. There is no one route or time frame to become a FIFA referee, but it would usually take a minimum of five years

or even more, and lots of experience in Singapore's professional football league (S.League) before one is given the honour of donning the FIFA badge.

The feat of Singapore producing world-class referees is all the more astonishing given the fact that referees from Singapore (even those who are current FIFA referees) hold other full-time jobs. Unlike their counterparts in countries such as Japan, they do not rely on refereeing as a full-time career and have the ability to juggle their refereeing duties with their work. With the majority of games being held on weekday nights and weekends, it becomes possible for them to carry out their refereeing duties in their free time.

What drives these individuals to take up the whistle? A myriad of reasons motivates an individual to become a football referee. Some of the more popular reasons include a passion for local football, the opportunity to earn some pocket money or the possibility of refereeing at the international level. Whatever their reasons, all referees have one thing in common: their steadfast love for the game of football and the desire to see rules enforced in a fair manner. This is what inspires these people from all walks of life to join the exclusive club of football referees, numbering at most a few hundred individuals in Singapore.

Being a referee on the field of play is not easy, as you are at the forefront of controlling the players, moderating the game and enforcing the rules. In a contact sport such as football, it is often unavoidable that emotions can get the better of players. It is the responsibility of the referee to ensure that despite all these issues, the game is run in a smooth and fair manner. A football referee can be considered to have one of the toughest officiating jobs in the sporting world. This can be attributed largely to the fact that only the centre referee

has the authority to make the big decisions and every decision has a huge impact on the game. To be able to manage twenty-two men on the pitch is no easy feat, and an individual who yearns to be a referee should embody the traits of composure, discipline, and the ability to thrive under pressure.

With a motley crew of Singaporeans and PRs comprising the local referee fraternity, it is no surprise that, once in a while, some notable and inspiring individuals do surface. One such individual is Mr Patrick Tay. You probably have not heard of him as he does not even referee at the S.League level. However, what is remarkable is that at the age of 65, Tay is still a registered referee of the Football Association of Singapore (FAS). Having joined the referee fraternity at the age of 53, he continues to defy the naysayers by passing the referee fitness test every year with a score that many of his younger counterparts would envy. He also officiates at many football matches each year from the primary school to adult amateur league levels. Patrick has been an inspiration to many referees and other Singaporeans alike, as he continues to set a new record every year by being the oldest active referee in the country. As the only referee in Singapore to hold a pioneer-generation card, his story is inspiring, especially to people in his age group.

Singapore has a long tradition of producing world-class referees. We are often looked up to in the international referee community as having the best referees in ASEAN and also some of the best in Asia. By being in this privileged position, we have the opportunity to give back to the game by imparting our knowledge and advice to referees from other countries in the region. We also have the duty to continue to train our next generation of budding referees from Singapore. With big boots to fill, the next generation of referees is under pressure to emulate the achievements of their predecessors. At present,

the refereeing route represents the only opportunity for any Singaporean to reach the FIFA World Cup. Past examples have indeed shown that it is an attainable goal. Hence, with much optimism, it is our nation's hope that we will see the next Shamsul Maidin at the upcoming 2018 World Cup in Russia and for many more world cups to come.

Singapore's WTO: Addressing a Basic Need

Timothy Ang Wei Kiat

Introduction

Much ink has been spilt documenting Singapore's economic success – and rightfully so. In 2014, Singapore was ranked by international bodies as one of the best three markets for foreign trade and investment, and the country with the best investment potential. To top it all off, Singapore was ranked as the best place to do business for the seventh year running. Given Singapore's numerous economic accolades, it is unsurprising that the world perceives Singapore with economic-tinted lenses.

Little attention has been given to Singapore's achievements in global social causes. This essay's aim is to advocate that Singapore's image to the world is *more than merely a topping of economic rankings*. In furtherance of the essay's objective, the author will use and analyse the example of World Toilet Organisation ("WTO"), a "Made in Singapore" non-governmental Organisation (NGO) which came up with Singapore's first United Nations ("UN") resolution: "Sanitation for All".

Roadmap

This essay begins by pointing out how proper sanitation, which Singaporeans take for granted, is not readily accessible to a substantial portion of the world. It relates how a Singaporean, Jack Sim ("Sim") stepped up, took the initiative and created WTO to combat this problem. The essay analyses the global impact of WTO's programmes.

The reasons for the choice of WTO and Singapore's first UN resolution are twofold: first, it is one of the few examples of a bottom-up approach between a Singaporean and the government. Second, and *more importantly*, the example allows

the essay to portray how WTO mirrors the example of Singapore in addressing relevant issues on the global stage, notwithstanding its small size.

Sanitation – A Global Issue

Lest one scoffs at the gravity of the lack of proper sanitation, here are facts to place things in perspective:

Sanitation is subsumed under the seventh of the eight UN Millennium Development Goals: "Ensure a sustainable environment." We are in 2015, and the results leave much to be desired. Currently, two and a half billion people still lack basic access to proper sanitation, with one billion of that number still practising defecation in open spaces. The lack of access to proper sanitation leads to serious health issues as human faeces is one of the primary modes of spreading diseases and infections. Inadequate sanitation is a key contributor to diarrhoeal diseases, which claim the life of a child every two-and-a-half minutes.

WTO as a Response

Sim created the WTO as a response to the absence of a global co-ordinating body for the sanitation advocacy movement. In an interview, Sim recounted that the genesis for WTO began when he was in Tokyo in 1999 for the AsiaPacific Toilet Symposium. Despite having multiple sanitation advocacy groups from 15 different countries, there was no co-ordinating global entity. As the Japanese hosts refused to take the lead due to language barriers, Sim took the initiative to create the WTO, using Singapore as a platform.

Small in Funding, Herculean in Impact

It is axiomatic that NGOs require funds to implement their programmes to advocate global social issues. The larger the scale of its programmes, the more funds WTO would require. WTO's outreach programmes include an annual global World Toilet Summit for the past 14 years, establishing the World Toilet College, running a social enterprise called Sanishop that provides toilets in rural areas, and various hygiene awareness programmes on a global scale.

The impact of the WTO cannot be doubted. Not only has its founder, Sim, been awarded both the Schwab Foundation Social Entrepreneur and the Ashoka Global Fellow – two prestigious global social entrepreneurship accolades – the WTO is recognised globally for its impact. Apart from being endorsed by the Clinton Global Initiative and the World Economic Forum, the WTO was accredited by the UN Committee on Non-Governmental Organisations and conferred special status in 2013, allowing it to have a say during Council meetings. The global recognition for the WTO bears testament to the positive impact of its programmes.

This begs *the* question: how is this "Made in Singapore" NGO, categorised as a small organisation given its modest fund size of S$250,000 a year, able to capture that much global recognition above the myriad of countless other NGOs?

Creating Global Relevance

There are parallels between Singapore and the WTO in creating relevance and a space on the global stage. In a recent speech, Bilahari Kausikan explained that for Singapore to be globally relevant as a small country, its only option is to have an extraordinarily successful economy.

Profits are not an NGO's primary goal. the WTO's relevance has to be achieved via other measures of success. However, the fact that relevance is both fashioned and preserved by human endeavour applies equally to both Singapore and the WTO.

Three Fronts: Appeal, Monetary and Political

The WTO has made the issue of sanitation relevant on three fronts: appeal, monetary and political backing.

Appeal

As a starting point, Sim adopted the acronym "WTO" as a humorous pun on the World Trade Organisation. He used movies to appeal to the masses. He co-wrote and embedded the issue of sanitation in a local comedy titled "*Everybody's Business*". He is also working on a Bollywood film, titled "*Life Without Toilets*", which will be targeted at India's masses. Sim and the WTO employ humour as a tool to break the taboo on the topic of sanitation and make it relevant to the masses.

Monetary

On the monetary front, the WTO persuades corporations, banks and microfinance institutions to see that the sanitation issue is relevant to their organisation. The WTO is aware of its shortfall in funds and that donations per se are not going to solve the sanitation issue. Accordingly, instead of merely appealing for more donations, the WTO has repackaged the sanitation issue as one of commercial interest and relevance to corporations. Profits and good public relations are what drive corporations and banks. the WTO recognises that

corporate social responsibility ("CSR") is the flavour of the day as consumers prefer goods that are produced by companies that actively engage in CSR. The WTO has estimated that the sanitation market is worth about US$1 trillion. With a large market and the prospects of huge profits coupled with garnering goodwill from the public, WTO has managed to convince MNCs like Unilever Ltd to enter into a partnership in India and Cambodia.

Political

On the political front, the WTO is aware that while sanitation has always been acknowledged as an issue, it is only one of many important issues that governments have to address. Coupled with the fact that sanitation is an unattractive subject, it is unsurprising that it is always shunted to the back of the line of problems to be dealt with. Politicians and governments need to be incentivised to push the sanitation issue to the fore. The WTO creates relevance by characterising sanitation as an economic issue. Poor sanitation is estimated to cost developing countries US$260 billion annually, equivalent to a whopping 1.5 percent of their GDP. Every dollar dedicated to combating poor sanitation will yield a healthy workforce that can bring a five- fold increase in productivity. Unlike corporations, convincing governments requires more effort due to multiple policy considerations. WTO has utilised global political avenues like the UN to further its objectives.

UN Resolution: Sanitation for All

The WTO works with Singapore's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) to make itself heard in the UN. It convinced the MFA to table a resolution on sanitation, designating 19 November

as World Toilet Day. It took 10 months of intense lobbying by the MFA in New York to get the UN to adopt, in 2013 Singapore's sponsored resolution, Sanitation for All. WTO, a "Made in Singapore" NGO, has gained global recognition. Despite their small size, both Singapore and the WTO have found ways to be relevant on the global stage. The 2013 resolution was a royal flush as it allowed *both* the WTO and Singapore to *further* propel themselves on to the world stage.

The Burger Chronicles

Sushawn Nag

Vani Shriya

The year was 1966, just one year after Singapore's independence, when an unknown American chain set foot upon the country's shores, never dreaming its entry would irrevocably change the country. The fast food industry in Singapore began with A&W, an all-American restaurant. A&W bade farewell to Singapore in 2003, unable to compete with the many fast-food chains that followed in its wake.

Three chains – McDonald's, Burger King and KFC – dominate the fast-food market. McDonald's holds the lion's share with 41 percent of fast-food sales in 2013. Their outlets are not only in the downtown area but also found in all the public-housing estates. Their ubiquitous presence is puzzling, especially given concerns about the health impact of fast food. Singapore has a huge variety of tasty dishes served in hawker centres or food courts. Indeed, local food is very much of the country's cultural identity.

The fast-food industry in the USA took off in the 1970s, with the entry of a large number of women into the labour market. In 1975, a third of the mothers were employed, a figure that has since doubled – leading to a situation where most families saw both parents working outside of the house, leaving less time and opportunity for household chores. This led to a greater demand for convenience, a key component of the fast-food experience. Fast food provided parents an affordable and convenient way to feed their families. While families of yesteryears spent three quarters of their household food budget on groceries to prepare meals at home, that figure is less than half today as spending has shifted to restaurant meals, with a disproportionate amount of it on fast food.

The growth of the fast-food industry coincided with a shift in the American diet. On average, the number of calories consumed by Americans has increased by hundreds of calories

per day over the last several decades. In addition to eating more, Americans have changed their eating habits. They eat 31 percent more processed and packaged food than fresh food and 20 percent of their meals are eaten in cars. These trends highlight the pervasiveness of the fast-food culture in America. The most iconic of all American fast-food brands, McDonald's, is so prevalent in American society that one in eight people in the American workforce have, at some point in their life, worked for the chain.

Why American chains came to Singapore is a question with a straightforward answer, why they succeeded is not. Singaporeans have a love affair with food that verges on obsession. A multi-ethnic population has created a huge variety of dishes, from Hainanese chicken rice to Malay *nasi lemak* and Indian *biryani*. Food-obsessed Singaporeans will queue for their fix of dishes like *mee pok*, Indian *rojak*, *wonton mee* or *char kway teow* at their favourite stalls. In contrast to the splendid diversity of Singapore food, that offered by American chains has a standard, predictable taste. Bland though it may be, American fast food is hugely popular. In 1979, a MacDonald's outlet in Singapore set a world record for the most burgers sold in a single day. In 2013, a queue of over 300 customers lined up at a single McDonald's outlet.

Both instances can be considered an example of 'Food FOMO', or Fear of Missing Out, a phenomenon usually used to describe social-media interactions, but that also captures the Singaporean mindset. Faced with a choice between standing in line for hours for a burger and getting a collectible they may not really desire versus being excluded from a shared social experience, most people would opt to queue.

However, Food FOMO is only a facet of the true answer, and cannot explain the brisk business these chains do daily. Another possible explanation stems from the multi-ethnicity

of the population. Given the openness of the Singaporean economy, the city-state is home to many expatriates and foreigners, many of whom find a comforting familiarity in the big yellow M or the smiling face of Colonel Sanders. So is the presence of fast food simply an expression of cultural diffusion? Singaporean food culture is a smorgasbord of offerings from various cultures, of which American fast food is one. This explains the presence of 'sit down' fast-food restaurants – chains like Pizza Hut – that offer a slightly more upscale ambience and dining experience here in Singapore. Such restaurants cater to the socialising aspect of meals here in Singapore and Asia in general. Families and friends treat meals such as dinner as an occasion to interact with each other and fortify their connections. The food is secondary. This still leaves the question of the popularity of grab-and-go fast food unanswered.

One fundamental aspect of the Singaporean lifestyle is the emphasis on professional life and meritorious advancement. Singaporeans take pride in working long hours at difficult jobs in order to climb the professional ladder and are not afraid to make hard sacrifices along the way, such as foregoing sleep, hobbies and lunchtime. Most professionals grab a quick bite, spending less than 20 minutes on their food, often eating hunched over their laptops at their desks. The convenience of fast food outweighs everything else – it is cheap, can be consumed while walking or driving to work. Fast food makes for a relatively non-fussy meal, requiring nothing more than a napkin to wipe your fingers after. While hawker centres remain popular with most of the local population, fast food is a more convenient alternative at comparable prices.

In the past few decades, the fast-food industry in Singapore has reached an equilibrium with the more successful chains still expanding their number of outlets while others have exited

the industry. The industry faces its greatest challenge as health concerns are growing. Fast food is notorious for being highly processed, full of sugar and being nutrient deficient. It has contributed greatly to rising obesity levels in countries such as the USA, where there is a growing trend towards a more healthful lifestyle. This trend is also increasingly evident in Singapore and has spawned opportunities for different kinds of food. In the USA, fast casual restaurants like Panera and Chipotle are increasingly popular. These convenient restaurants focus on fresh high-quality ingredients, in-house preparation and high levels of customisation. Singaporeans will likely find them appealing too. In time to come, such restaurants, like earlier food imports, will enrich the Singapore food scene.

How Catalan Cuisine Came to Our Shore

Arnau Bosch Ruiz

"When in Singapore, do as the Singaporeans do: eat great food. From the many hawker restaurants to gourmet venues spearheaded by Michelin star chefs, you'll soon discover that food is a significant part of Singapore's culture – and that travelling to the other side of the island in search of a good meal is nothing out of the ordinary."

– Anonymous

Sitting at a bar made out of thousands of domino pieces and surrounded by Catalan decoration while observing the open kitchen where cooks prepare the most delicious and authentic meals, I find it almost difficult to believe that I am not in Barcelona anymore. I am, instead, in FOC, a recently opened restaurant in Singapore, whose specialty consists of the most creative Catalan and Spanish cuisine. *Foc* means "fire" in Catalan and it is the perfect name to describe Spanish cuisine in general and the Catalan one in particular, because of the huge number of regional traditions that involve fire. Taking a look at the active and dynamic staff from my bar stool, I can easily identify Spanish Chef Jordi Noguera and Italian mixologist Dario Nocentini. However, the restaurant team consists of a total of 20 people from different nationalities and the majority of them are native Singaporeans and Malaysian PRs.

After a good talk with head chef Jordi Noguera (A. Bosch, personal interview, 23 January 2015), I understood that the opening of this restaurant was the culmination of a series of

rather amazing events. Noguera officially started his training to become a chef in Spain, although he did a brief stint in London. With the contacts he gained during his apprentice-ship, he came across the opportunity to be part of the bar project "FoodBar Dada" in Singapore. This was the start of his work life in Singapore. When his friend and famous one-Michelin star chef, Nandu Jubany, came to Singapore to lecture at a local university, they decided to meet up. This talk turned out to be one of the biggest steps of Noguera´s career to date, as they decided to start their own restaurant. This was because they believed that Singaporean food culture provided an amazing arena for them to display their own style of food. In this restaurant project there were three main players:

1. Nandu Jubany, with his superior knowledge of food and motivation to go overseas
2. Jordi Noguera, who had accumulated experience and understanding of the Singaporean food culture and culture in general.
3. Heng Tien Yao, a Malaysian investor, who provided the capital to start of the project.

Two more associates are financially involved in the project–Ong Ee Leong, and designer Gabriele Schiavon. The latter is also responsible for the décor of the restaurant – a laidback environment with touches of Catalan elements as decoration. For example, the large Catalan facial masks, called *capgrosso*s, are used as light figures, and other Catalan motifs are hung on the walls. Undoubtedly, it is an original approach to the Catalan culture in the city of Singapore.

According to Noguera, the most difficult task of opening the restaurant in Singapore was not the bureaucracy, which in fact is more efficient and straightforward than in Spain, but the challenge of seeking the perfect location and determining

the layout of the establishment. After a long search, they finally found a place in Chinatown, which is near enough the financial district, and spacious enough to create four different areas for the pickiest clients: a bar, an area with dining tables, and area with bar tables and a private area, all complemented by mood music.

According to Noguera, the objective of FOC is to cater to a moderately priced market for individuals who appreciate good service, quality food, and a comfortable setting in which to eat. It is not meant to be a fine, dining restaurant. Moreover, appreciating that liquor is indeed a social lubricant, FOC serves cocktails that are made by certified mixologists.

Despite only serving Spanish and Catalan cuisine, FOC does not entertain as many expatriates as you think it might. Eighty percent of its patrons are actually locals! Of course, there are also expatriates hoping to alleviate their homesickness by enjoying a Spanish or Catalan meal.

To provide the best experience to all clients, the menu consists of two different main food groups. The first group is called "From Barcelona to Singapore" and seeks to provide a traditional understanding of Catalan and Spanish cuisine. Some dishes on this menu are *Padron* & *Piquillo* peppers and *Patatas Bravas*. The second group is called "From Barcelona to the world" and includes a fusion between Spanish food and other cuisines from around the world. In this second menu, do not be surprised if you find some Asian specialties interpreted from a Spanish perspective. An example of the Barcelona to the world menu dish is Grilled Scallops with Soy Caviar & Bonito Stock. However, desserts are all Spanish and Catalan. You can also complement your meal with Spanish wines or cocktails. The acceptance of the locals towards Spanish food is high and is reflected in their demand for it. The proof of it lies in

the fact that the most popular dishes are the once in the "Barcelona to Singapore" menu: octopus Galician style, bread with tomatoes, and *croquette*s are hot favourites. Even on weekdays you can easily find the FOC establishment crowded with Singaporeans eating Mediterranean squid ink *paella*.

One question that may cross your mind is how a restaurant in Singapore can create and cook the best Catalan and Spanish food, being located 14,000 km faraway from Barcelona. FOC manages to retain its authenticity by importing ingredients that cannot be found locally and sourcing other ingredients at the local markets. For instance, the bread for the dish "bread with tomato" is special bread imported from Spain. However, the shellfish for the *paella* is bought at Singaporean wet markets. Furthermore, some culinary techniques such as the way to spread the tomato on the bread have to be adapted in order to achieve the most similar taste and texture as the originals in Spain.

The impression from public interviews with Jubany (Freixa 2014) and my personal interview with Noguera is that they hope to turn FOC into a regional brand. New FOC establishments might be opened in Singapore and Asia, introducing new concepts but keeping the essence of fresh, elaborate Catalan cuisine. Through the experience they have gained, they are both convinced that Asian people love Catalan and Spanish food. Therefore, investing in Singapore might be really rewarding due to the open-minded attitude towards food and the rising demand for Spanish cuisine. This ambition is also bolstered by FOC's success: in the third week after its grand opening, it was already dealing with a full house of patrons. Noguera attributes this success to word of mouth and the fact that many Singaporeans interested in their work closely follow him and Jubany.

In fact, FOC is not the only restaurant that has successfully spread Spanish and Catalan cuisine in this giant city called Singapore. Catalunya restaurant, located in Marina Bay Sands, also offers a great variety of Catalan and Spanish cuisine from the kitchen of Pol Parello since its opening in 2012. In sum, it is a matter of acceptance, which has been achieved through the openness of Singaporean people at trying out new types of food and appreciating it. Before going to FOC, I could not imagine so much interest Spanish food in Singapore, but now that I have, I am proud of my culture and happy to see that it is being enjoyed by others overseas. Cuisine really does bring worlds together: in this case, it does so for Barcelona and Singapore.

Who's Polite in Today's World?

Alana Dresner

W hen I was a child, my mother constantly echoed the words of American poet Ralph Waldo Emerson when she said, "Life is short, but there is always time enough for courtesy." Having been in Singapore for over a month now, I have noticed many differences in the way that people perform acts of courtesy on a day-to-day basis. Although there are large dissimilarities between etiquette in the USA and Singapore, it is important to acknowledge that these differences are the results of cultural influences, long-standing practice, and priorities. Universal politeness can only be achieved if foreigners take the time to understand and accept the history and reasons behind the etiquette of different cultures.

I consider myself a polite person: I always say "thank you" when someone else does a small favour for me, I hold the door open for people who walk behind me, and I clean up after myself after every meal. These innate practices are the result of conditioning from my parents, peers, and even forms of media like television and movies. Over the past 21 years, I have formed opinions of what I believe to be "right" and "wrong" in terms of behavioural etiquette. When I first arrived in Singapore, I witnessed a plethora of moments in which I ignorantly believed that Singaporeans were acting in a rude manner. However, after experiencing more of the Singaporean culture, visiting other countries in Southeast Asia, and listening to my classmates and esteemed speakers in our classroom, I realise that I am, in fact, being rude for believing that there are universal "right" and "wrong" behavioural practices that span all cultures.

Etiquette in Singapore and the USA differ, in part, due to differences in the historical foundations of manners. Because Singapore is a relatively new country and, comprises mainly

migrants or descendants of migrants, it adopted most of its practices from surrounding Asian countries. In *"Chinese Etiquette & Ethics in Business"*, author Boye Lafayette De Mente observes that "[t]he Chinese word for etiquette, *li*, which originally meant "to sacrifice," refers to the fact that following legally sanctioned etiquette required extraordinary sacrifices, not to mention detailed knowledge of hundreds of correct forms of behaviour." This squares with aspects of Singapore that are related to the country's strictness and attention to detail when it comes to laws, regulations, and even perspectives on the value of hard work. Having interacted with a few of my Singaporean class-mates, I have found that Singaporeans take schoolwork extremely seriously. From my perspective, people in Singapore value perfection and strict adherence to the rule of law, which is not common in the USA.

Although some Asian forms of etiquette are physical, De Mente highlights the notion that Asian manners mainly stem from relationship-based actions. He says, "[t]he relationship between people in all classes were based on carefully pre-scribed forms of behaviour that covered virtually every aspect of conduct – so much so and to such a degree that learning and following proper etiquette was one of the major facets of life." In addition, Asian culture focuses on the relationships between people and their elders. According to *Business Insider*, seniority plays a large role in Singapore when it comes to eti-quette, regardless of whether someone is at home or in the workplace. In the USA, people generally respect their elders, but there is not as much of an emphasis on this aspect of our culture.

The origin of commonly accepted American etiquette prac-tices could be traced back to areas of Europe during the Renaissance era. Jesse Rhodes of the Smithsonian found that

"manners were a response to the violence and crude behaviours run rampant in burgeoning cities and a means of reinforcing social order and distinguishing the privileged class from everyone else." Most of these practices, though, are related to table manners, as meals played a large social role in daily life and sometimes included multiple courses that lasted several hours. Thus, when Europeans settled in the United States, they brought with them their deep-seated beliefs about what they considered to be "polite", and these became the basis for what American etiquette is today.

As an American, I admit that most forms of etiquette are shallow and focus on physical actions rather than on shaping relationships between individuals. When I was 12, I attended a cotillion class along with dozens of my school classmates. We learned how to eat properly, dance, and interact with other people in a mature setting. In the USA, some parents sign their children up for cotillion and debutante balls because, in some areas of the country, it is the norm. In my hometown of Palm Beach, Florida, a handful of kids at my school went to cotillion because their parents knew of other parents who sent their kids to cotillion. Being the "odd one out" as the parents who do not sign their children up for cotillion is not frowned upon, but it makes parents feel better knowing that their children partake in a class that they believe teaches them how to act in polite society. Personally, I find that the lessons they teach are extremely outdated, because I have not yet needed to use the skills that I acquired during the class.

There are courses in Singapore that are geared towards teaching students etiquette as well. For instance, The Etiquette School is a resource that promises to equip its customers with "the necessary skills and grace to 'fit in' with today's sophisticated society". On the main page of its website, The Etiquette

School stresses the importance of etiquette in the business world, even citing a study by Harvard and Stanford that shows a successful business career (and life) is achieved 15 percent because of technical skills and 85 percent because of "people skills." Unlike American etiquette classes, which promote learning different kinds of manners in the hopes of becoming a more mature person, Singaporean etiquette classes aim to breed a mature businessperson. Because etiquette training in Singapore is heavily focused on teaching etiquette for business reasons, it is important to consider Asian work culture and the significance of success.

In his *"The Brutal Truth About Asian Branding And How To Break The Vicious Cycle,"* Joseph Baladi dedicates an entire chapter to explaining the "five reasons why there are very few great Asian brands." Baladi describes the first reason as "myopic CEO leadership," which has hindered the success of Asian brands for decades. He explains, "[t]he CEO is driven almost exclusively by a desire to (only) make money – and rarely by passion." When it comes to branding a company, Baladi says "[a]s a result, Asian consumers fail to love, lust after, or be inspired by most Asian brands." This analysis of a typical Asian CEO highlights an idea that many of my Singaporean peers have described to me in detail since my arrival: Asian people simply want to succeed. People succeed in different countries by acting in different ways, so who am I to say that my version of politeness is more "right" than that of a Singaporean?

In my opinion, one of the worst mistakes is taking something personally when exposed to situations in new cultures. When I first attended my classes, I could not help but notice that very few Singaporean students wanted to get to know me, let alone be in a group with me. In the USA, my American

classmates and I seize any opportunity to speak with foreign-exchange students at our school, so I was confused about why the same did not apply to me in Singapore. However, after researching and speaking to a few honest Singaporean students involved with the SMU Buddy programme, I learned that SMU students view the exchange students as "lazy", since we are unavailable for meetings due to our travel plans and also because most of us only need to pass our classes to get credit at our home university. They believe that exchange students, in general, get in the way of an SMU student succeeding. Now, I completely understand and accept this outlook because this is a part of a deep-rooted culture that I prefer to embrace rather than try to change.

If there is one lesson that my business school has taught me, it is that diversity is important in the real world as well as the workplace. One Forbes study "identified workforce diversity and inclusion as a key driver of internal innovation and business growth." As an exchange student, I am aware that my background can add new perspectives to the lives of Singaporean students – for example, I can teach them new slang words, show them new fads and fashions, and introduce them to new music. However, my influence can only affect aspects of their lives that are ever-changing and flexible; I cannot forget that I am an American living in Singapore and that my idea of etiquette is not the norm anywhere I go. Politeness is the ability to adapt to the acceptable behavioural expectations of one's surroundings, regardless of how greatly these etiquette practices differ from those in one's point of origin. My time in Singapore may be short, but like Emerson, I believe there is always time enough for courtesy.

Are Singaporeans Happy?

Satomi Manabe

The primary aim of most people in the world is to pursue happiness or so they profess. Happiness depends on an individual's personal experiences and cannot be measured objectively. There are many ways to define happiness. In this essay, it is described as a state where one displays feelings of pleasure and enjoyment.

Superficially, Singaporeans should be one of the happiest people in the world, due to the material comforts they enjoy. According to the World Health Organisation, Singapore has the world's lowest infant mortality rate, and the second lowest maternal mortality rate, and ranks ninth in life expectancy. From my observations, Singaporeans seem remarkably unhappy. They do not smile at strangers, are constantly complaining, and are usually scowling at their mobile phones. A recent Gallup survey confirms my observations. Singapore ranks among the lowest in terms of overall happiness. Why is this so?

In this essay, I will seek to answer this question by contrasting the generally unhappy Singaporeans with happy Danes, whose country ranks the highest in terms of happiness.

Perhaps a change in perspective is in order. Instead of determining why Singaporeans are so unhappy, it would be useful to ask why the Danes are so happy, since we are all human beings with no great biological differences amongst us. According to an article from *The Third Metric*, Denmark is different is for four reasons. The government of Denmark supports families, promotes gender equality, advocates cycling over driving automobiles, and encourages social responsibility. Each of these factors are considered in turn.

First, the Danish government has structured the running of its country to be highly pro-family. For instance, Danish parents are eligible for a total of 52 weeks of parental leave

from work with maternity subsistence allowance. Danish mothers can take 4 weeks maternity leave prior to giving birth, and 14 weeks after. Danish fathers are entitled to up to 2 weeks of paid leave, and the remaining 32 weeks can be divided between both parents. On the other hand, in Singapore, even though paternal leave is institutionalised to encourage and support shared parental responsibility, working fathers may only obtain 1 week of government-paid paternity leave, which must be taken within 16 weeks from the birth of their child. Maternity leave is not even clearly delineated by the government.

This lack of parental presence in the lives of children is a huge blow to their development, given that the personalities of children are formed whilst they are very young, which is when parental influence is most crucial. Every child learns from his parents how to behave, how to speak, how to live as a moral, upright individual, and how to interact with the rest of society. It is often reported that criminals tend to lack a healthy relationship with their parents. In my opinion, it appears that the Singaporean government and Singaporeans are sacrificing too much quality time in their pursuit of material success. They ought to focus more on their family life, as it is their families that they are working for.

Second, if someone of the opposite sex earns more salary than you while doing the same (or less) amount of work as you do, would you be happy? Although no country has managed to achieve full gender equality in both private and professional life, Denmark can be considered a model for gender equality in the workplace. Denmark places regularly amongst the top 10 countries in the Word Economic Forum's yearly report on gender equality. An example of Denmark's progress in the area of gender equality is the fact that leadership

positions are filled by an almost equal ratio of women and men. However, the same report scored Singapore poorly, especially in leadership. 94 percent of cabinet ministers, putting Singapore in 128th place when it comes to the proportion of women in ministerial positions; granted however, that in terms of equal pay for doing similar jobs Singapore ranks well, placing 10th in gender pay equality in the world.

Third, 50 percent of the residents of Copenhagen, Denmark's capital, ride bicycles to school or to work. The health benefits are clear: the life expectancy of those who cycle for just 30 minutes a day increases by one to two years. Cyclists keep stress down and feel better about themselves. A study done by health economists at the University of East Anglia and the Centre for Diet and Activity Research found that cycling and walking provide greater health benefits than driving everywhere. The same study found that those who switched over from driving to cycling or walking benefited more, both physically and mentally. In Singapore, however, few people ride bicycles to work, though many ride in park connectors or on weekends.

Last, have you ever found that you feel happier after helping someone else? The level of volunteerism in Denmark is high, showing that Danes feel responsible to their society and want to contribute back to it. For instance, more than 40 per cent of Danes volunteer in cultural and sports associations, NGOs, and social and political organisations. In contrast, Singaporeans tend to not be active in volunteerism. While many are willing to make monetary donations, few of them would actively help strangers or volunteer for charitable work. A survey carried out by the World Giving Index 2013 ranked Singapore 64th out of 135 countries overall, with Singapore coming in at the second last spot for helping strangers.

However, Singaporeans rank 17th for monetary donations to charities. This begs the question of why Singaporeans are more willing to donate money than help strangers. In my opinion, this is due to the *kiasu* spirit of Singaporeans. According to the Singapore Dictionary, a *kiasu* person is defined as "one who is afraid to lose out to someone else, often to the point of selfishness; an over-cautious person" and also being "afraid of losing out to someone else, and therefore often behaving selfishly and disregarding others". Since the fear of losing out seems to support economic growth as it encourages individual productivity, it may also be seen as a boon to Singapore. However, what about raising our own happiness by helping each other, and not only focusing on ourselves? The *kiasu* spirit means that we are often worried that by investing time and resources in helping others, we are losing out in the race towards material success.

Perhaps the common denominator that underlies the various factors is the difference in national outlook and emphasis. With the meteoric rise in economic prosperity, a good proportion of highly influential Singaporeans, from leaders to parents, form part of the generation who lived in the days where Singapore was a third-world port. Having encountered the difficulties of the past and the dizzying transformation through tight planning and technocratic leadership, they would emphasise the necessities (read: meritocracy, stability, economic prosperity, and efficiency) over the luxuries (read: egalitarianism, freedom, welfare systems). When one looks at the history of Singapore, it makes perfect sense for the people to be the way they are, to get out of the mud and into power.

Perhaps a little tweak in our behaviour is in order. According to Christopher Cheok, senior consultant psychiatrist at Khoo Teck Puat Hospital, "Humans have empathy neurons in our

brains that allow us to feel what others feel. Smiling even when there is nothing funny can make one happier. By smiling more, other people smile back and everyone is happier. If you can help your situation, it is better to hang around happy and positive people. In a similar way, studies have also shown that low mood can be transmitted between people and affects the morale of the whole group. If you want a happy environment, be the change that makes others happy." Happiness is contingent on our own perception of it.

However, to conclude, it is apposite to note the words of Benjamin Franklin: *Those who would give up essential liberty to purchase a little temporary safety deserve neither liberty nor safety.* Perhaps Singapore should stop having a third-world mindset, seeing itself as a small, vulnerable nation and embrace the changes needed for it to develop a first class mindset as well.

Fighting in the Red Dot

Kevin Ng Boon Kiat

At first glance, Sherilyn Lim is your average Singaporean girl. With her pleasant demeanour and youthful, bespectacled face, one would be hard put to guess at her career. At the tender age of 23, Lim already has a professional Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) record of one win and one loss in an international competition.[1] A far cry from the steroid-pumped, brutish, skinhead who delights at spilling blood (a stereotype that many unfortunately continue to associate with the sport), she is representative of a rapidly growing proportion of Singaporeans who make up Singapore's oft under-acknowledged but highly popular MMA scene.

Singapore does not have an established sports culture, something our government has been seeking to remedy. It is a common phenomenon to observe parents discouraging their children from doing sports, as they feel that sports would distract them from their studies. Furthermore, there is no 'viable career option' in sports. In this, the *kiasuness* of Singaporean fame is strongly manifested. The stigma associated with combat sports is even more pronounced. Beyond the usual distaste, there are other negative connotations within most parents' mind, such as the fear of injury, of developing a propensity for violence, etc. This has made Singapore's society a decidedly scholarly one, rather than the warrior cultures of our neighbours, especially Thailand and Indonesia.

Martial arts did not enjoy a good reputation in the 1970s, which also happen to be the formative years of today's parents. Back then, gangs and secret societies frequently plagued Singapore, with martial-art skills often used either in gang clashes or to intimidate victims. Thus, in 1974, the parliament passed the Martial Arts Instruction Act, which required anyone who took up martial arts to register with the Registry of Societies. They also created the Martial Arts Control Unit to police the act. This act was only repealed in late 2004.

It is this cultural and historical backdrop that makes the rise of MMA surprising for many. However, due to several factors, such as our openness to the influences of the world, especially American culture; the long Asian history of martial arts; and the strong drive to be the best in everything and anything, it is a matter of time before a global phenomenon like MMA would take root within our shores. The rise of several key players within our own shores has played a pivotal role in this shift.

Many parallels can be drawn between MMA and Singapore. Much like how Singapore is an amalgamation of various cultures with stunning and significant growth in recent history, MMA is a truly multicultural sport. Its birth was heavily influenced by Brazilian, Japanese, and American cultures.[2] Current MMA practitioners hail from all over the world, often practising martial arts not native to their own culture.[3] In the process they develop an appreciation for other cultures, elements of which they assimilate into their lives. Lim is a Singaporean (Chinese) who trains Muay Thai under Ajarn Udom (a Thai), Brazilian jiu-jitsu under Shane Suzuki, (a Japanese-Australian), and MMA under Darren de Silva, (a Portuguese). Furthermore, MMA has exhibited phenomenal growth, from a small, relatively unknown sport to a subculture with adherents from all over the world.

Meritocracy is one of the cornerstones of Singapore's society and the official guiding principle for domestic public policy. However, it is a common criticism, both in Singapore and around the world, that the fundamental assumptions of meritocracy are no longer valid. Not everyone starts off equal – family background plays a huge role in future 'merits'.

Interestingly, MMA shows meritocracy in one of its purest form. Lim used to be much heavier and unfit. Neither did she

have the benefit of growing up and training in the various martial-arts disciplines since a tender age. However, despite her 'bad' starting point, hard work and dedication allowed her to compete at the highest level. In doing so, she is living out the Singaporean story, of chasing your dreams and succeeding based on your merits, regardless of where you start out.

Any MMA scene requires a complete ecosystem to survive. This includes gyms, promotions, sponsors, etc. Unsurprisingly, the general sentiment is that the MMA culture and ecosystem is the most vibrant in both Brazil and the USA. These countries are regarded as having the best MMA gyms, the biggest promotions with the best fighters, and a vibrant pool of avid fans. Contrary to popular belief, Singapore is often regarded as the best place in Asia for MMA, overshadowing traditional martial arts powerhouses such as Japan and Thailand. Indeed, it has been said that although Asia is the spiritual home of the martial-arts, Singapore has become its epicentre, with the biggest live shows and the best training facilities. Due to constraints, this essay focuses only on the two biggest aspects in the ecosystem: One Fighting Championship (OneFC), a Singapore-created promotion and Evolve MMA (Evolve), a chain of MMA gyms based in Singapore.

The local MMA training scene is dominated by Evolve, the largest chain of MMA academies in Singapore. It was founded in 2009 by an ex-Muay Thai fighter-turned-asset manager-turned-gym owner, with trainers being predominantly ex-Muay Thai champions from Thailand. It quickly gained popularity and grew rapidly, attracting various other big name fighters and trainers. Within five years, it grew into an Asian phenomenon, with three other outlets opening in rapid succession, and an online training university. Furthermore,

it overtook other more established gyms in other countries to become Asia's top MMA gym.[4] However, this is not the only gym in Singapore. There are many other smaller gyms that have had their own share of successes, such as Fight G (from which Lim hails), Juggernaut Fight Cub, Impact MMA, etc. These gyms have trained fighters who have made it to international promotions,[5] and have also developed partnerships with gyms in other countries.[6]

OneFC is a testament to Singaporeans punching above their weight. It opened in the Singapore Indoor stadium in 2011, featuring renowned fighters from various parts of the world, most of them having flocked to Singapore to train at Evolve. Since then, it has held shows in Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia), Jakarta (Indonesia), Manila (Philippines), Dubai (UAE), and Beijing (China). In addition to drawing in the local crowds, it is broadcasted by domestic television channels in Asia, pay-per-view internet shows, and around the world through ESPN Star Sports and Fox Sports.

It is intriguing and unexpected to many that a country commonly labelled 'boring but competent' would be a global leader in MMA, a relatively 'wild' sport. Before OneFC, the biggest promoter in Asia was the now defunct PrideFC. Many comparisons have been made between the successes of the Singaporean business approach and that of the Japanese.

The oft cited reason for the death of PrideFC was the *yakuza*'s strong involvement and mismanagement. This led to widespread corruption and match-fixing scandals, which negatively affected the entire combat-sports sector in the eyes of many Japanese mainstream sports fans, and prevented traditional mass media from giving it extensive coverage. Furthermore, a prevalent soil-over-everything preference coupled with a substantial population crisis in Japan and a lack of good MMA

gyms led to a dearth of talent to sustain the promotion. As the final nail in the coffin, the *yakuza* has a terrible track record of promoting fight events in other countries on their own accord because they tend to do things the 'Japanese way' and refuse to adapt to the business practices of other countries.

Singapore's extremely pragmatic and flexible business model has made OneFC a huge success. In contrast to Pride's favouritism, OneFC has actively recruited renowned fighters across Asia. These fighters are not world famous because they are experts in locally established sports. For example, Sityodtong is a national hero in Thailand. However, despite being a WBA[7] boxing world champion with a 58–3 record with 48 KOs, he remains unknown in the western world. OneFC has made it a quest to recruit such talents, building up its international roster until it is made up of heroes like Yodsanan Sityodtong. This all-encompassing openness to foreign talent is highly reflective of Singapore's own foreign talent policy.

OneFC is also an excellent manager. It pays its fighters well, and has a fresh, flexible approach as well as excellent managerial, marketing, and organisational skills. These qualities have allowed OneFC to generate the biggest revenues, attract a big number of sponsors and enjoy a healthy balance sheet in Asia and the backing of very rich shareholders.

Furthermore, MMA is doing Singapore's reputation and tourism industry a world of good. Sporting events showcase Singapore as a well-rounded, active, and exciting tourism destination. The development of home-grown sporting events, like OneFC, adds to the vibrancy of the ecosystem. The result is that OneFC attracts attention, sponsorship, and assistance from the Singapore Tourism Board and Economic Development Board. OneFC has placed Singapore in the eyes of tourists from all over the world, who now come to Singapore to train to take in an MMA show in addition to other attractions.

Companies are also taking advantage of this trend. Evolve has launched a vacation tourism programme which attracts MMA fans from all over the world to visit Singapore, soak in the local culture and train. MMA superstars are flocking to Singapore. Famous fighters from the USA such as former UFC middleweight champion Rich Franklin and Bellator welterweight champion Ben Askren travelled halfway across the world to train. The popularity of MMA in Singapore has attracted global MMA heavyweight, the UFC, where it held its first, sold-out Asian promotion, prompting them to plan further shows. Other countries are taking a cue from Singapore and used MMA for similar purposes. Sabah Tourism Board and tour agency Amazing Borneo have entered into a partnership with OneFC to promote Sabah as a top tourist spot.

MMA's contribution to Singapore's sports scene has other economic impacts. Top international sports companies have grown their presence to drive regional strategy, manage operations, and access the large Asian consumer base. Singapore provides a good location in terms of accessibility, enabling them to reach out to the ASEAN and Asian market.

Singapore MMA has also contributed to Asian MMA. One example of it is in Taiwan, where MMA is still in its infancy, with much of the content limited on the island. OneFC has given Taiwanese fighters an international experience and turned thousands of Taiwanese into fans. Furthermore, it has allowed Taiwanese fighters like Paul Cheng to return to their homeland and attract new blood like Jeff Huang to leave his corporate finance job to pursue his passion. Jeff Huang won his debut OneFC fight.

Our own fighters have been featured in international newspapers. Lim's story has found its way to newspapers in many countries, including Cambodia and the UAE, where her

message of personal change through dedication and hard work is setting a fine example. Her story is empowering Asian women and changing the societal stereotype that women should be gentle housewives, staying at home to take care of the children. It has helped change the image Singaporeans as a boring people to one that is lively and exciting.

The MMA scene has come a long way since its birth in America some four decades ago. Since then, it has travelled across the world to our sunny island-state, sunk roots, and is now embedded in our culture. For its part, Singapore has influenced the world through the image and popularity of MMA. In many ways, MMA is an unlikely microcosm of Singapore culture, a culture of contradictions, paradoxes and over-achievers that has allowed the city-state to punch above its weight class, economically, politically and diplomatically.

Notes

1. MMA promotions are companies that produce MMA fighting events.
2. Modern-day MMA as we know it, was first introduced in the USA. The brainchild of Rorion Gracie, Helio's eldest son, it was meant to demonstrate the Brazilian tradition of Vale Tudo fights and promote Brazilian ju-jitsu. Brazilian ju-jitsu is a martial art developed by Helio Gracie, a Brazilian, from judo techniques. As such, several Japanese traditions and ceremonies feature strongly in Brazilian Jiu Jitsu, even though it has evolved to a totally different sport, with different emphasis and techniques.
3. For example, the former 3-time welterweight champion of the Ultimate Fighting Championship, Georges St- Pierre is a Canadian mixed martial artist but uses a variety of martial art styles when fighting, including Kyokushin Kaikan, Gaidojutsu, Shidōkan (Japanese), wrestling, boxing (American), and ju-jitsu (Brazilian).
4. Some of the awards includes: Asia's top MMA gym, January 2014, FOX Sports; Asian MMA Camp of the Year, December 2013, MMA Mania; #1 MMA camp in Asia, January 2013, MMA Mania; Best MMA gym in Asia, January 2013, The Fight Nation.
5. For example, Royston Wee and Bruce Loh from Impact MMA, Lim, Brad Robinson, and Ronald Low from Fight G to name a few.
6. For example, Fight G is currently in its third year of its partnership with Evolution MMA Mumbai, an MMA gym based in Mumbai, India. Fight G provides sponsorship, cultural exchanges, training camp and most importantly, opportunities for these fighters to make a name for themselves in Singapore and Asia, something India cannot provide.
7. The World Boxing Association (WBA) is an international boxing organisation that sanctions official matches, and awards the WBA world championship title at the professional level.

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